

Foreword (pp 5-7)

This album is devoted to the works of a unique pysankar—Taras Horodetsky, a man who spent his entire life in the small mining town of Chervonohrad in the Lviv region of Ukraine. Despite this, he was well known by collectors not only in Europe, but in the United States and Canada. He was probably better known abroad than in his own beloved Ukraine.

Taras, it so happened, left this life before his time. In this book we'll show you but a small portion of his creative legacy, but hope to help you to get to know this unparalleled master. This book will help you, dear reader, to understand the great talent of this pysankar, who remains unequalled at this time.

Taras was born August 28, 1964, in the town of Chervonohrad. His father Yosip (Joseph) Horodetsky was originally from nearby Zolochivshchyna, and, from his youth, had been involved in the national independence movement in the benches of the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army). In the late 40s Yosip was repressed and exiled to Siberia, where he remained for ten long years. When he was at last allowed to return to Ukraine, he was initially settled with his family in Crimea. Yosip's oldest son, Roman, was born there. After five years the family was allowed to move to a town on the western Buh river—Chervonohrad—in whose mines Yosip would labor the rest of his life. Taras's mother, Stefania Horodetska (née Pynda), was also from Zolochivshchyna, and was a nurse by training.

Although there were many teachers and priests in both his mother's and father's families, none of them got caught up in the bloody postwar wave of Soviet terror. It was certainly no accident that the Horodetskys named their youngest son Taras. He was born, after all, in 1964, the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Great Kobzar, Taras Shevchenko. The Horodetskys raised all of their children to love the history of their native land, and to love their Ukrainian folk traditions, language and culture.

In 1981 Taras completed Secondary School Number 11 in the city of Chervonohrad with a gold medal, and then entered the Lviv Polytechnic Institute, where he studied engineering. After graduation, he worked as an engineer from 1986 to 1992 in the industrial parks and building sites of Sokal, Chervonohrad and Lviv.

In 1992, after a visit to the Museum of Folk Life and Architecture in Pyrohly, near Kyiv, Taras began writing pysanky. Lviv artist Lesya Pryveda initially had a large influence on his work; she wrote pysanky, and, like Taras, was from Chervonohrad. It's likely that she first taught him how to write pysanky, and revealed to him the artistic possibilities of the curved surface of an egg.

For almost fifteen years Taras created his marvelous pysanky, which have since spread out all over the world. Knowing his exceptional work ethic, his pysanky probably numbered several thousand. During these years he did not have a steady employment in his field; not only was it extremely difficult to find such employment, but he couldn't move away to seek work, as he was caring for his ailing father. Thus he lived primarily off of pysankarstvo. Taras was not only an artist, but also an expert on folk art, and collected traditional folk pottery and straw handicrafts. This man was also tireless wanderer. Taras had wandered all the footpaths of his native Sokal region, and knew not only each forgotten village, chapel, and roadside cross, but where every flower, herb and tree grew. Taras had traveled throughout nearby Volyn, and grew to know the Carpathian region quite well. He could organize a tour of every oblast, and give the traveller a full understanding of Ukraine's historical and cultural riches. Sadly, he didn't get a chance to do this.

Living in Chervonohrad, Taras was *out of the mainstream of* active cultural life, which was sorely lacking in his home town. He came to Lviv often and visited the museums—not a single exhibit escaped his attention. Every year he travelled to the national folk handcrafts fair at the museum in Pyrohly (near Kyiv), where he would make the acquaintance of all sorts of folk artists, among them other pysankary. I believe that Taras influenced many of them with his work. Up until the end, Taras maintained good relations with many pysankary through letters and telephone calls.

Taras generally created his own compositions on pysanky, but also loved traditional designs, and he experimented with natural dyes. He became the first person in Ukraine to make "white on white" (etched) pysanky. Many other pysanka artists immediately took up this innovation. While preparing my book "The Ukrainian Folk Pysanka" for publication, I turned to several pysankary for help in writing pysanky, among them Taras. With little discussion, he immediately agreed to help, and wrote almost 50 Hutsul and Sokal designs. Some time later he donated a portion of these pysanky (those from Sokal) and some of his own compositions to the Chervonohrad branch of the National Museum; it is thanks to this that they remained in Ukraine and we were able to include them in this album.

All in all, Taras was a good and generous person. When, prior to leaving us, he bequeathed his pysanky to his friends and acquaintances, it was reminiscent of the dividing up of a king's jewels among his successors. These pysanky are now priceless pearls in his friends' collections. Their value lies, in part, in that they are the most fragile of artistic works. Even the Japanese wonder: why did Ukrainians decide to create works of art on such an uncertain surface as an eggshell? There is much room here for a philosophical reflection on the peculiarities of the Ukrainian soul, but we'll leave that to the philosophers. Taras, however, would not not have been a Ukrainian to his very core, had he not been fascinated by this most fragile material, which could break at any moment. It spoke to his humble nature, and to his desire to preserve this most threatened national craft. One must bear in mind that pysankarstvo is quite exciting; one can easily "catch" it, and Horodetsky was susceptible to it.

He was, surprisingly, a humble person, and always approached his own work critically. There was in him a natural intelligence, but also an attachment to everything Ukrainian. He belonged—because those people, who belong wholly and undividedly to the nation, certainly had to be on the Maidan, everywhere, where the Ukrainian pulse beats—because he always hurt. And this is not pathos, because this man would never have climbed onto the grandstand and beaten his chest—he avoided publicity altogether. There are simply people with a special national hypersensitivity, which forces them to not only to express their feelings, but to fan the fires of "Ukrainianism" in all they do.

Taras valued his Ukrainian nature, and was even, one could say, obsessed by it. And it is such an obsession that allows us to cross the limits of the ordinary and to make breakthroughs.

The work of Taras Horodetsky was such a breakthrough in the not yet professionally mastered field of pysankarstvo.

He raised its level to an art of elegant lines and intricate compositions.

Many try to copy him, but have been unable to recreate Taras' unique filigree-like work and his harmonious colors and compositions. Why? The egg is not only a fragile material, but a traitorous one. The same pysanka design turns out differently for each person, as individual as a fingerprint. One would

also need to achieve Taras's level of virtuosity with the pysachok: his lines are so fine that it's thought that he wrote his miniatures under a magnifying glass. And, like many important personages in this or that field, he was an experimenter and researcher, and searched for new techniques of artistic expression .

One somehow wants to compare him, in many aspects, to Volodymyr Ivasyuk. When people with such a great creative potential leave us so suddenly, there is a feeling of sorrow at the loss of all they might yet have created. Is it possible that they have done all that they were meant to do? Our plans are often quite different from God's.

On the last pages of this album you will be able to view some of Taras' works from the last months of his life, pysanky that were given to Zenoviy Shul'z. Altogether, very few of his works have remained in Ukraine. No museum, besides that of Chervonohrad, can boast of having any of his pysanky in its collections. This book will give you the opportunity to see a small portion of his works that remains in collections in his native land.

So I wish you a pleasant wander amid the pages of this album. I hope that these small masterpieces placed here, will prepare you for the eternal and beautiful , that is always in our lives, but that you have to discover for yourself.

With regards
Vira Manko