

Features

Exhibit recalls Kiev's lost architectural heritage

By Donna De Palma

In our modern epoch, the dismantling of a cultural and religious heritage is seldom so thoroughly depicted as in an exhibit of photographs currently on display at Pyramid Arts Center at the Village Gate. "The Lost Architecture of Kiev," a national touring show organized by the Ukrainian Museum of New York City, has made a stop in Rochester thanks to the efforts of three local chapters of The Ukrainian National League of America in this millennium year of Christianity in the Ukraine.

One can only be grateful for the efforts of the exhibit's curator, Titus D. Hewryk, historians and museum staff for preserving a visual record of the numerous Byzantine cathedrals and monasteries — some dating back to the year 1000 — that met with the tragic fate of Kiev. Whereas many of cities of Europe — Warsaw, Leningrad, Dresden and Coventry, to name a few — were ravaged by industrialization and the world wars, Kiev fell to an altogether different force. Hewryk's exhibit catalog explains:

The fate of Kiev the capital city of Ukraine, has been markedly different from its sister cities. Kiev has not had to undergo great pressures of industrialization. Neither did the city share the terrible fate of such urban centers as Warsaw, Dresden or Coventry during World War II. Its historic monuments and urban complexes were casualties of another kind of campaign. It was during the peaceful pre-war years of the 1930s that the architectural landmarks of Kiev — important elements of its urban forms that contributed to the homogeneity of Kiev's townscape and that had a symbolic significance to its inhabitants — were mostly dismantled. This was a campaign of dynamite and the ax waged for many, and largely suspect, reasons.

To this day architects and historians are attempting to retrace the destruction of Kiev. Formal records were not kept of the dates of demolition of more than 20 cathedrals, monasteries and monuments in or near the city's center. In many instances, little or no study was done of the historical value or impact these major sites had in the medieval city, which overlooks the western Bank of the Dnieper River.

Walking through this collection of illuminated black and white photographs, one attempts to reconstruct a culture of high aesthetic achievement and of Byzantine structures that stood for hundreds of years. The experience is reminiscent of a solemn procession into a past filled with the shadows of ancient giants, somehow looming larger than anything in the contemporary world. It also speaks of the elusive nature of visual memory and the ever-present urging of the psyche to reconstruct events after trauma.

Few architectural landmarks remain today in Kiev, whose main street — Khreshchatyk — features architecture built in the 1950s in a style referred to as "Mussolini Modern." This is startling for a city that was the center of an architectural school of Byzantine style during the 10th and 13th centuries and a focal point of the Romanesque influences of Southern Europe, 17th century Baroque art and architecture and the Russian "imperial" neo-classicism of the 19th century. Hewryk writes:

Developed during the years of national autonomy, the exuberant forms of the Baroque architecture in Ukraine of the 17th and 18th centuries symbolized the self-confidence and national aspirations of the Ukrainian people and its aristocracy.

According to Hewryk, the Ukraine kept pace with the contemporary architectural idioms until the late 1920s, a crucial period in the history of the capital.

Historically the site of Kiev, located on the Hora or Hill, had been selected for its defensive position. The medieval site was known as Uppertown, and it thrived until the Mongol invasion of the 13th century. Soon thereafter, the



Leisa Telega, president of Branch 120 of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America displays some of the photographs featured in the "Lost Architecture of Kiev" exhibit at the Pyramid Art Center. Linda Dow Hayes/Courier-Journal

city center shifted to the Lowertown or the Podil, an area of merchants and guildsmen.

The uppertown still sponsored activities surrounding the Byzantine medieval churches, which were renovated and enlarged during the 17th and 18th centuries in the Baroque style. During that period, the Cathedral of St. Sophia (Sofiiska Katedra) and its monastery and the Monastery of St. Michael of the Golden Domes (Zolotoverkhyi Mykhailivskiyi Monastyr) were the most outstanding landmarks of the Old Town. Hewryk writes:

The Monastery of St. Michael was located to the northeast of the Cathedral of St. Sophia, near the edge of a bluff overlooking Lower-town. The Monastery's main church, St. Michael of the Golden Domes, was built in 1108-1113 by Prince Svyatoslav II. It was the second largest church of the medieval city ... One of the many Byzantine churches of the Middle Ages, which were rebuilt in the Baroque style, the Church of St. Michael was probably the most successful in blending the original Byzantine structure with the ornate Baroque of the 18th century. The interior walls of St. Michael were still almost entirely Byzantine while the exterior was clothed in Baroque, conveying a picturesque appearance of rich forms and ornate decor. As in other Baroque monastic complexes, the main entrance, at the western end of the monastic walled courtyard, was accented by a tall campanile (1716-1719) ... Inside the church a five-tier iconostasis (screen dividing the sanctuary from the main body of an Eastern Orthodox church) funded by Hetman Skoropadskiy and executed by Master Hryhoryi of Chernihiv was installed in 1718...

According to Hewryk, the Ukrainian academic community opposed the proposed demolition of St. Michael's, but in the spring of 1935, work was begun on the removal of the Baroque cupolas over the masonry domes. Works of art, including the silver royal gates of 1812, Hetman Mazepa's reliquary ("raka") of some 32 kilograms of silver were removed. The iconostasis inside the Church also disappeared. Then in the spring or summer of 1936, St. Michael's Church was blown up with dynamite and all accompanying structures were

pulled down.

Unlike so many other churches in Kiev, the Cathedral of St. Sophia was preserved and now houses a "State Museum." St. Sophia, built in the first half of the 11th century, like other Byzantine churches, was altered during the Baroque period. In 1934, this church was closed for religious services, reopening as a museum in 1935.

But the exhibit catalog notes that even St. Sophia's was stripped of its works of religious art, which were destroyed, as described in this description published in the West by the former director of the St. Sophia Museum:

Between 1935 and 1937, eight Baroque iconostases, all works of local Ukrainian artists of the 17th and 18th centuries, were dismantled. The most valuable of them was the iconostasis of the Altar of the Presentation (18th century), which had formed the middle story of the main iconostasis and was transported to this altar in 1888 ... The government ordered the gold leaf stripped from these monuments of Ukrainian Baroque wood carving and the carvings themselves burned. The royal gate, weighing 114 kilograms and made of silver reliefs covered with gold — which was located in the main iconostasis and were the work of the Kievan masters Volokh and Zavadovskyi (1747) — was taken away. Among the other objects removed from the cathedral were four silver candelabra of the 17th century.

The late 1920s was a turning point in the preservation of the cityscape of Kiev. The Archeological Committee of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences at that time had begun plans for the establishment of a state preservation district in the oldest portion of Uppertown, or the Old Town. This plan, referred to as the "Kievan Acropolis" was replaced in the mid-1930s by a new city plan designed by Soviet authorities, which called for the reshaping of the city's center and the demolition of most of its historical and religious landmarks.

Most of the cathedrals, monasteries and monuments of Kiev began to disappear between 1934-37. The only landmarks that were ultimately "preserved" were the St. Sophia architectural complex and the Rococo Church of St. Andrew, which had been built by czarist

court architect Bartolommeo Francesco Kas-trelli.

As churches were closed and landmarks demolished, Soviet authorities could not successfully construct the "Capital Center" they had proposed. In fact, after many years of reviewing plans and eliminating Kievan architects' proposals for preservation, only marginal structures replaced the once splendid examples of the Byzantine and Baroque styles. Some sites remain vacant even today. The post-Stalin period of the 1960s saw a reemergence of the "Kievan Acropolis" concept. Hewryk writes:

In the late 1960s the old Lowertown of Podil generated the interest of Soviet Ukrainian architects and historians. Investigations and surveys stimulated the City Council's decision of March 19, 1973 to establish controls over future development of the Podil. Proposals were also made to rebuild some of the lost landmarks. Subsequently, based on the Communist Party's directives regarding development of tourism, plans were formulated for the development of the Podil into a tourist center.

Leisa Telega, president of the Branch 120 local chapter of the Ukrainian National League of America, member of the local Ukrainian Commemorative Committee and the person responsible for presenting the exhibit in Rochester, hopes that the acknowledgement of the millennium and its emphasis in the free world will show the community at-large the scope of the Ukrainian culture.

Certainly, "The Lost Architecture of Kiev" reveals how ideological wars can and continue to in our contemporary world erase cultures of high aesthetic achievement and strong religious tradition. Beyond this fact, the show is a tribute to the generations of Ukrainians who choose to remember not only the events of persecution, but also the spirit and identity of a nation that expressed its freedom and grandeur through art and architecture.

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Hours for the Pyramid Gallery showing of "The Lost Architecture of Kiev" are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday daily through December 9.

Verdicts

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February 1, after a pre-sentence investigation is completed on Long and Gerald Crawford. Simple trespass is considered a violation and carries a maximum sentence of 15 days in jail.

In her closing arguments, Prosecutor Joanne Winslow told jurors that "abortion is not on trial here, these people are on trial" and that "each and every one of these defendants went too far when they held that floor hostage from people who had a right to be there."

During testimony, Project Life members contended that they staged their demonstration because they wanted to save lives. Before jurors began deliberating, Regan told the jury that it could take this defense into consideration when making their determination.

Because the demonstrators were allowed to use this justification defense throughout the trial, Long said he "felt much more comfortable" in front of the Rochester City Court jury than he had felt before a Brighton jury which last month convicted him and Crawford of criminal trespassing and resisting arrest.

Last May, members of Project Life occupied the fifth-floor east wing of

Highland Hospital, where physicians perform abortions on Saturday mornings. After demonstrators refused to leave when police arrived, they were removed from the hospital in wheelchairs.

In a related matter, the Project Life director said he may appeal the Brighton decision if Brighton Town Justice John J. Ark sentences him and Crawford to more than 90 days in jail. Long said that he became aware of what he termed "several procedural errors" in the Brighton trial while he was on trial in Rochester City Court.

He said that the basis of his appeal may rest on what he called "manipulation" by Ark in the jury-selection process. Long said that he and Crawford's attorney, Scott C.

Smith, were given only 15 minutes to select a jury, whereas jury selection in Rochester City Court trial lasted several days.

Smith, who had represented civil litigants only before becoming involved in the criminal trials of pro-life activists, also asked to be taken off the Brighton trial after claiming conflict of interest. Smith's wife was arrested in the second Brighton rescue.

According to Long, Ark declined the attorney's request even after Crawford fired Smith on the record.

Long said that Smith is one of more than 10 attorneys in the Rochester area who have expressed a serious interest in defending demonstrators in upcoming cases on a "pro bono-publico," or free, basis.