

Archipenko: The Canadian Connection
Denis Hlynka, PhD and Robert Klymasz, PhD
Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies
University of Manitoba

On January 29, 2007, a story by Val Ross appeared in the Globe and Mail titled "When Ukrainian means Canadian: A modernist bust by a European artist has been deemed part of Canada's heritage"

The article, dealing with sculptor Alexander Archipenko, explains how a particular work, titled *Flat Torso* qualifies as a Canadian work due to its age and significance. The work is therefore to be treated as Canadian, and is therefore subject to keeping this object in Canada for Canadian museums. The argument is an interesting one, and well taken.

However, in making the argument, the article (and we assume therefore the Art Gallery of Ontario) makes two curious assumptions. The author writes

"Archipenko was born in Kyiv in 1887, lived in France and Germany, and died in New York in 1964. He never set foot in Canada."

This information is inaccurate. A major Archipenko retrospective was held in Winnipeg, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery from January 14 to 31 1962. The show consisted of 46 Archipenko works. In addition, the event included a lecture given in person by Alexander Archipenko, at the Winnipeg Auditorium, January 15, 1962. Apparently the archives of the Smithsonian in Washington DC contain both the text and an audio recording of this lecture.

The Ukrainian Canadian Winnipeg community was actively involved in the event, in particular Winnipeg's Alpha Omega Women's Alumni in cooperation with the Women's Committee of the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

A programme booklet was produced which included a four page introduction by Ferdinand Eckhard, then director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, as well as a three page excerpt from the book *Archipenko: Fifty Creative Years, 1908-1958*.

A second statement in the Val Ross Globe and Mail article quotes Michael Parke-Taylor of the Ontario Gallery of Art as saying "We'd been looking for an Archipenko piece for years -- there are only three known in Canada,"

This is a harder statement to dispute. However, the collective faculty at the University of

Manitoba's Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies, can account for at least three pieces and two lithographs. One piece belongs to the Winnipeg Art Gallery (The Boxers), a second is in a private collection, while a third is in Toronto. Whether or not other works exist is unknown to us, although the programme booklet noted above lists 46 works and includes the statement "All items with few exceptions are for sale." Given the stature of the artist, it would seem unusual that so few works would have been sold during this Winnipeg exhibition.

Finally, perhaps Parke-Taylor was not extending his comments to lithographs, only to bronzes. However at least two lithographs do exist in Winnipeg. Both are titled Form Vivant and described only as "lithograph, ink on paper, date unknown."

While we applaud the Art Gallery of Ontario for being able to obtain an Archipenko for its collection, the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) acquired its Archipenko almost half a century ago. In 1962 Winnipeg was still the third largest city in Canada, and the hub of Western Canada. The Winnipeg Art Gallery is the oldest civic gallery in Western Canada, founded in 1912.

Since the Val Ross article appeared in the Globe and Mail two weeks ago, the faculty members at the Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies have been able to contact several of those involved in the Archipenko exhibit. Many Winnipeggers remember with fondness Archipenko's visit to Manitoba as a pivotal event in the history of Manitoba's art community.