

'Scandalous'...

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"Ukrainian" ones were exhibited.

Oksana Kovalenko remembered that her mother's family were "Stalin's exiles" (Russians) of the 1930s to the Kirovohrad region, "and they said 'fufaiyka,' but her father's Ukrainian family, in the same village, called the jackets 'kukhvaiky, kufaiyka.' All wore them all the time, even in the summer evenings. The kufaiyka represented warmth for her grandfather in his old age. The kufaiyka were hung separately from the dressy clothing, the coats and jackets. 'My husband's grandmother, 87, still wears her kufaiyka outside and going out into the world, i.e., to the center of the village. Only our interference will convince her to wear something else.'

Iryna Pihovych wrote that "the exhibition is interestingly presented, it is a parallel with the present-day consciousness of our people. The fufaiyka is a symbol of the ordinary but not patriotic Ukrainian. This is a spiritually cultural provocation. Interesting... and even more interesting would be to look through the clothing lying on the pile."

Dr. Maryna Hrymch of Kyiv National University commented that "this is a controversial theme, but in this is its point. Our grandmothers and mothers wore these fufaiyka/kukhvaiky all their lives. From one aspect, this was a thing very utilitarian for village life and for work, at a time when there was not the contemporary technology to produce warm clothing. These 'teplushky' [warm things] saved the [political] prisoners in [Siberian] lumber camps from freezing. This was also a unique Soviet expression of 'gender equality' and the emancipation of women (of course, in a Soviet understanding). This is particularly why many who are commenting on these fufaiyka speak about them with even a kind of sentimental-



Bohdan Poshvailo

A pile of Ukrainian embroidered garments and woven textiles on the floor of the museum symbolizes the state of Ukrainian culture today.

ity, because these jackets were the only things in that ascetic way of life. Another part of the public considers this as a 'manifestation of our slavery' in Soviet times. And, not so strangely, both sides are correct."

Dr. Hrymch continued, "Those who know Petro Honchar understand that there is great irony in the title of the exhibition. Yesterday he told me that the idea for this came to him at this year's official Shevchenko evening which, as people told me earlier, was a completely appalling event. This installation is a act of protest. As Petro Honchar stated, 'People are discarding genuine ethnographic objects because they are worthless rags. When asked what they are holding on to, the people point to these disgusting never-cleaned things. And these are our people.'"

Oleh Iwanusiw of Toronto commented online: "At first I was stunned by the exhibit. But later on, thinking about it, I believe Honchar is making a statement – the fact that Ukrainians are abandoning their traditions, they are abandoning their home-

made, home-sewn and finely embroidered clothing and turning to this drab, dirty, torn made-in-some-foreign-land clothing."

One commentator wrote online that "Kufaiyka on the wall, and embroidered clothing in a pile [on the floor] as if no longer wanted? I don't understand something. This is an artistic project? If so, this is very sad." In reply, another person wrote, "This is the whole point of this artistic project, that the kufaiyka are on the wall and embroidery on the floor. This is a metaphor for all Ukrainian culture of the 20th century."

"These hanging fufaiyka from many regions and the pile of 'second-hand' embroidery on the floor in the middle of the gallery works. It forces us to powerfully feel and relate with someone or something, which can't be understood right away. A strongly impressive idea, it strikes a blow," commented a person identified only as Iryna.

"And in the middle of the main hall of the museum, an enormous pile of authentic Ukrainian folk clothing. Of course, this cuts the eye and the soul, but the purpose of the

project is that people pay attention to what we value and what we do not," Viktoria Khomenko wrote in Gazeta.ua.

Someone writing under the name "Zarobitchanka" (wage-earner) commented: "...No object can be the national ideal – neither the ugly dirty fufaiyka, nor even such an aesthetic thing like the festive embroidered shirt. These are only symbols. The kufaiyka is a symbol of a hard life and the eradication of the individual during Soviet totalitarian society, while the embroidered shirt is a symbol of the continuity of the traditions of the Ukrainian peasant nation. Neither one nor the other can be absolute, because neither guarantees a free and harmonic development of a citizen. One can wear an embroidered shirt and be on his or her knees, obsequiously serving, forgetting honor and conscience because of a piece of bread or a position or who is in the government. On the other hand, one can wear a kufaiyka all his or her life and still be a dignified honorable person."

"It seems obvious to me that the museum is making a strong, if ironic, statement that whereas in the past Ukrainian people have created works of aesthetic beauty, current conditions have impoverished the Ukrainian spirit, reducing it to the shabby, if barely functional. Yes it is shocking – but in the sense of shock therapy, which hopefully can bring the society back to its senses," observed Marijka Ulanowicz of Maryland.

Compared to other installations in fine museums around the world, this one is neither scandalous nor pointless. I remember two-by-fours on the gallery floor, the vessel of an artist's blood suspended from the ceiling, rabbit carcasses hanging from trees, doll heads in suitcases, and exhibitions thrown out by the janitor as garbage because he truly thought that's what they really were... In these cases, the medium was the message, with no message at all.

However, with this exhibition, Petro Honchar clearly sent a message.