

Sculptor Leo Mol

Leonid Molodozhanyn (Leo Mol) was born January 15, 1915, in the village of Polonne. His birthplace was rich in good clay and its inhabitants were literally a community of potters. Mr. Molodozhanyn's father, Hryhorii, came from a long line of potters. His father and mother, Olha, labored hard to make life as comfortable as they could for their children and themselves.

When Mr. Molodozhanyn was 11 years old he worked almost full-time for his father, modeling clay and working the potter's wheel. At age 15, with his parents' reluctant blessing, he went to study painting in Vienna.

After Mr. Molodozhanyn spent several successful years at the studio of Wilhelm Frass, Frass advised him to go to Germany where he would find some of the best sculptors in Europe under whom he could work and study more effectively. While in Vienna he became fluent in German and acquainted himself with the history of world art, music and theater. The young Ukrainian sculptor was thus introduced to an artistically rich new world.

In Berlin the sculptor Frans Klimsh, on Frass recommendation, hired Mr. Molodozhanyn as an assistant. There he worked in terra cotta "baked earth" and plasticine. With Klimsh's support, Mr. Molodozhanyn was accepted into the Berlin Academy.

The war years were not too difficult for Mr. Molodozhanyn in Berlin. In early 1942 he met his future wife, Margareth, and they were married in September 1943. In the spring of 1945, as Soviet troops were trying to occupy Berlin, Mr. Molodozhanyn and his wife escaped from the city and headed west. They traveled by train to Amsterdam, and then were moved to a refugee camp in a monastery in Eindhoven. He began to attend The Hague Academy.

However, they decided to move to Canada. However, before leaving Holland Mr. Molodozhanyn decided to change his Ukrainian surname, Molodozhanyn, which had too many syllables, to his pen name, Leo Mol.

In the meantime, his friends in western Canada urged him to settle there. They stressed that the Canadian population included many Ukrainians and that his wife spoke fluent English. He applied to the Canadian Embassy at The Hague for a visa. When, after a health examination, he was questioned about his profession and he answered that he was a sculptor, the Canadian immigration officer pointed out that Canada needed farmers not artists. But Mr. Mol succeeded in persuading the reluctant officer and applied for the visas.

Traveling to Canada, the Mols stopped in London. Finally they sailed from Southampton to Halifax in Canada and from there by train to Saskatchewan. On New Year's Eve of 1949, they reached their friends' farm at Hudson Bay Junction near Prince Albert. Their trip was very unpleasant. They experienced high snow banks and very cold days. Since their sponsors were grain farmers, there was nothing to do there in winter. Bored and restless, Mr. Mol decided to explore the nearest big city, Winnipeg. Soon his wife joined him there. In Winnipeg, Mr. Mol worked very hard and for very low pay decorating churches. At St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church he produced beautiful religious compositions including the Virgin Mary, Christ, St. Edward, God the Father and angels - all twice life-size. Soon he received a series of church commissions in St. Anne and Brandon.

Mr. Mol's decided to devote himself to figurines with Canadian themes. Armed with samples of his figurines, the artist approached local retail outlets and soon became associated with fine ceramics in the Winnipeg area. Today those figurines remain among the finest ceramic figurines in the country.

Most of Mr. Mol's modeled originals of the 1950s were produced in terra cotta and baked in a kiln. Under the artistic impact of Arno Breker, a famous German sculptor, Mr. Mol modeled 100 portrait subjects. Interestingly enough, each of his portraits was truly individual with strong physical

characteristics. His portrait of Alan Eastman received high praise from Paul Duval as "a very pensive study suggesting withdrawal and reflection."

Other portraits include the painters of the Canadian "Group Seven," artists Jacques Hnizdovskyi, Alexis Gritchenko, P. Kuch, Sviatoslav Hordynsky, and sculptors Arno Breker, Frances Loring, A. Darahan, composers Peter Tchaikovsky, Mykola Lysenko and Aleksander Koshetz. He also did portraits of P. H. T. Thorlakson, Victor Sifton, former editor of the Winnipeg Free Press, and John Juba, former mayor of Winnipeg.

Over the years he received commissions from the Canadian government, as well as the provincial governments of Alberta and Manitoba, the University of Manitoba, and St. Clement's Ukrainian University in Rome.

Winning the worldwide competition for the design of the Washington monument to the Ukrainian bard and painter Taras Shevchenko increased Mr. Mol's Canadian and international reputation.

This monument, which stands on federal land in the District of Columbia took him almost two years to complete. It included not only the creation of the bronze figure of the poet, but also a larger free-standing bas relief of Prometheus as a symbol of the power of knowledge to ignite the mind and dispel the shadows of ignorance. The relief is located beside the base of the statue which was unveiled in 1964. Mr. Mol was very fortunate to win a second international competition for a Shevchenko monument - this time for statues to be erected in Buenos Aires, Argentina (1971), and in Prudentopolis, Brazil (1989). Mr. Mol's latest monument to Shevchenko was erected in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2000.

More of Mr. Mol's monuments appeared: a monument of Tom Lamb, a pioneer aviator (The Pas, Manitoba, bronze 1991), "The Pioneer Family" (Ukrainian Heritage Village, near Edmonton, 1980), a monument to St. Volodymyr (Winnipeg, 1984; Saskatoon, 1988, Toronto, 1989; London 1988; the Vatican 1988), a monument to the writer Ivan Bahrianyi (at the cemetery in Neu Ulm, Germany, 1966).

Mr. Mol was awarded first prize in a national competition for the monument to John Diefenbaker (Parliament Hill, Ottawa, 1986) and a monument to Max Bell, "Prairie Schoolboy" (Winnipeg, 1990).

Mr. Mol has executed many portrait-busts of noted world figures, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, former president of the United States; Winston Churchill, former prime minister of Great Britain; Popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II; Cardinals Josyf Slipyi, Tisserant (in the Vatican), Metropolitans Ilarion, Maxim Hermaniuk and Andrey Sheptytsky in Philadelphia; and also a larger than life-sized figure of the pontiff in Altötting, Bavaria.

In addition to his sculpture, he designed and executed more than 90 stained-glass windows, including 30 for the St. Volodymyr and Olha Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral in Winnipeg. Some of these windows are masterpieces with delightful Ukrainian accents; they depict the Ukrainian celebration of Christianity in a warm and wonderful manner.

In his monograph "Leo Mol," Mr. Duval writes, "I know of no set of Canadian church windows that so eloquently celebrate a congregation, its members' inheritance and its faith."

The Leo Mol Sculpture Garden, which is located in Winnipeg, was conceptualized in early 1989 when the artist decided to give his personal art collection to the city. The idea of a permanent display became a reality with the combined cooperation of the Provincial Government, the City of Winnipeg and the city's Parks and Recreation Department. The Leo Mol Sculpture Garden officially opened near the English Garden in Assiniboine Park on June 18, 1992. It included a display of priceless bronzes, porcelains, paintings and sketches by Mr. Mol.

It is the first delightful outdoor one-man gallery in North America. Situated on three acres, it has become a favorite cultural place for the public to enjoy, free of charge, and to admire the beautifully landscaped garden with an outstanding display of art. No average art institution accommodates as many

art lovers as the garden can. Many who have never visited an art gallery gain a unique opportunity to see and to learn about sculpture.

The Leo Mol Sculpture Studio, situated in the garden, has been kept intact just as the artist left it, complete with molds and plaster casts of major commissions. The display provides the public with a glimpse into the process by which bronze sculptures are created.

On opening day, the display of 28 sculptures was viewed in the open and in the shadow of the trees, while in the studio one could view some 90 smaller sculptures. This was only a part of the display, while other sculptures were stored in cabinets to be used at other times.

The Sculpture Garden has a visible Ukrainian character. As visitors enter the garden, a statue of a trumpeter, a Ukrainian Hutsul, welcomes them (the Hutsul's trumpet is called a trembita in Ukrainian). Among his large sculptures in the garden is a monument of Taras Shevchenko with Prometheus. This sculpture is seven feet tall and is a copy of the original, larger monument that can be seen in Washington. One can also view a statue of Shevchenko's head (70 centimeters). In addition, there is a Shevchenko monument as seen in Buenos Aires with a composition of "Haidamaky," a working model for a part of the monument to Shevchenko in Buenos Aires. ("Haidamaky" is based on Shevchenko's poem of the same name.)

A bronze sculpture of Moses also is a part of the garden and probably derives from the famous Ivan Franko poem of the same name. Among the artist's smaller sculptures, which can be viewed in the studio, are "Bandurist" and "Anna Yaroslavna."

Mr. Mol continually adds new sculptures to the garden, which has beautiful horticultural features that support his sculptures. The garden currently houses approximately 300 bronze sculptures of all sizes.

In 1995 the Leo Mol Sculpture Garden was a recipient of the CP/RA Award of Excellence for Innovation. In addition, the Manitoba Parks and Recreation Department recognized the garden with an Award of Merit.

Mr. Mol has not neglected portraiture even in recent years. It has always been and remains his first love as a sculptor. His infinite enthusiasm appears in a recent sculpture of Nykyta Budka, the first bishop of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Canada. This portrait is truly unique, with strong religious characteristics, and was donated by the artist to Ss. Volodymyr and Olha Cathedral.

On May 28 Mr. Mol was recognized with the Ukrainian president's Order of Merit for his immense contributions to Ukrainian and world sculpture and for being not only a famous citizen of Canada but at the same time, a great son of Ukraine.

On June 10, Canada Post issued a domestic-rate commemorative stamp depicting the sculpture "Lumberjacks" by Mr. Mol. Long fascinated by the strength, skill and endurance of loggers, Mr. Mol began a small bronze sculpture of lumberjacks in 1978; that sculpture was the inspiration for a monumental bronze sculpture completed in 1990 that now stands in Assiniboine Park.

Mr. Mol's works are found in many permanent collections in Canada; the National Portrait Gallery, Washington; the Vatican and the Vatican Museums in Rome; St. Clement's Ukrainian University, Rome; the Ukrainian Canadian Art Foundation, Toronto; and in private and corporate collections throughout Canada and the United States.

Mr. Mol is a member and past president of the Manitoba Society of Artists, a member and past vice-president of the Sculptors Society of Canada. He is also a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, the Allied Artists of America, the Muenchener Kuenstlergenossenschaft in Germany and the Society of Ukrainian Artists in the Diaspora.

Mr. Mol has received honorary degrees from the University of Winnipeg, the University of Alberta and the University of Manitoba. He was also made an officer of the Order of Canada in 1989.

Mr. Mol is an extremely dedicated individual who is not only patient but also very aggressive in his work; his work is flawless. He has dealt well and very stoically with disagreements and difficulties that have arisen in his career. Perhaps the best example is the difficulty he encountered with the congregation of St. Volodymyr and Olha Cathedral. When his sketches for stained-glass windows were rejected, he philosophically accepted the decision and quietly continued to attend the church for more than 10 years before the subject of the windows was revived and he was asked to design two stained-glass windows to complement the new murals. His patience rewarded, the congregation received the completed two windows with enthusiasm, and the artist was immediately asked to complete the remaining 14 windows that illustrate the history of the Ukrainian people and their religion.

This unique artist began his career with pottery, figurines, church decoration, stained-glass windows and animal sculpture and continued with sculptures of the human figure. During the 1970s he produced a number of life-sized female nudes known for their creation of a sense of movement and sensuality.

The artist was interested also in the classical tradition, especially in the field of portraiture. He realized the importance of portrait sculpture because without it we would have no concept of the appearance of such figures as Cleopatra, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and others.

It is interesting to mention that, for most of his career, Mr. Mol has managed without a regular dealer or agent. Living and working in a very competitive time, the artist did not always follow the stream of life. His patience and his aggressiveness in the field of sculpture have also helped other artists overcome great difficulties, thus helping them grow and develop throughout the world.

At age 91 Leo Mol is a master of his art. He is famous not only in Canada but throughout the world.

by Wolodymyr T. Zyla

Пам'ятник українському Кобзареві в столиці Канади



**Чи вам колись спадало на думку мати в Оттаві пам'ятник Тарасові Шевченку?
Або що він належатиме різцю відомого канадсько-українського скульптора Леоніду Молодожанинові?
Або, що пам'ятник, який може прикрашати столицю Канади вже є навіть відлитий у бронзі в Німеччині і ним
зацікавились покупці в Росії?**

Про це та інші цікаві речі відносно цього виклику - який знаєцька постав перед українцями Оттави, чи навіть перед всією українською діаспорою –
мати свій пам'ятник в канадській столиці,
і що для цього потрібно зробити,
ви зможете довідатись на зустрічі-зборах яка відбудеться за участю гостя з Вініпегу і представника скульптора Лео Мола, Михайла Титаренка

В неділю, 5 березня, 19:00
Hall of Ukrainian Shrine, 952 Green Valley Cresc.
(Off Prince of Wales Drive)

Опісля обговорюватиметься подальша стратегія залучення до цієї справи всіх наявних сил та ресурсів, котрі зможуть допомогти у втіленні задуму у найкоротші терміни, з огляду на хиткість ситуації.

Якщо ви відчуваєте внутрішній покликання віддати шану Кобзареві, маєте справді що сказати, дати ділову консультацію у сфері полегшення бюрократичної документації або будівництва, просто активно включитися до діяльності і додати свої зусилля у спорудженні монумента нашому видатному Землякові, - не згубіть рідкісний шанс, наданий історією лише раз.

Ваші діти, в майбутньому прогулюючись попри пам'ятник Тарасові Шевченкові, з гордістю казатимуть своїм ровесникам з України – у його спорудженні заслуга і наших батьків.
Єдина для отавської української громади унікальна можливість здійснити цей нежданий проект залежить від кожного з нас.

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