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TREASURES FROM THE CAVES OF UKRAINE MAKE U.S. DEBUT AT THE MUSEUM OF BIBLICAL ART

Uniquely Ukrainian Approach to Iconography Featured in *The Glory of Ukraine*

NEW YORK, May 28, 2010—The Museum of Biblical Art presents *The Glory of Ukraine: Sacred Images from the 11th to the 19th Centuries*, a collection of approximately 60 icons and rare objects from Kyiv's famed Monastery of the Caves and the Lviv National Museum, from June 18 to September 12, 2010. Seldom seen by the outside world, the collection includes one of the oldest Ukrainian icons in existence together with an 11th century cross as well as textiles, chalices and other liturgical objects. Characterized by vivid hues and shimmering gold leaf, this distinctive school of icon painting persevered for a thousand years, blending Eastern and Western influences while stretching back from the Renaissance and Baroque periods to its early Byzantine roots. Delving into the rich history that forged a united national identity, the exhibition reveals how Ukrainian icon painters maintained their exacting tradition throughout centuries of political and religious strife. The show, organized by the Foundation for International Arts & Education (FIAE), makes its United States debut at MOBIA.

"Ukrainian icon painting is striking in its originality," notes Dr. Ena Heller, Executive Director of the Museum of Biblical Art. "It was nourished by Eastern and Western artistic and religious practices, by themes drawn from the Orthodox and Catholic faiths as well as legends and folklore. We're excited to be the first venue in the country to offer museum-goers the chance to see these magnificent works which, with one exception, have never been seen in the United States. With the rebirth of political independence, Ukraine's cultural and religious history takes on added significance."

Greg Guroff, President of the Foundation for International Arts & Education and organizer of the exhibition, commented: "It has been a life-long goal to bring these exquisite works to the United States for audiences to enjoy firsthand. One can simply marvel at the masterpieces....Figures in Ukrainian iconography are more human and more emotional than in the stricter canonical forms of their northern neighbors, especially in facial features where they are less severe and elongated."

Exhibition Background and Highlights

Known as the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the Monastery of the Caves is an historic Orthodox Christian monastery located in Kyiv, Ukraine. Founded in 1051 by Saints Anthony and Theodosius, it is the oldest Orthodox monastery in Eastern Europe. Over the years, it attracted thousands of pilgrims from all corners of the Russian Empire. The Monastery's vast tunneling network of subterranean caves contains living quarters and underground chapels. Only one of these objects from the Monastery of the Caves' collection, to be displayed at MOBIA, has previously been exhibited in the United States.

The dominant feature within Ukrainian icons is the use of three colors: Gold represents the radiance of heaven, bold reds signify divine life, and bright blues symbolize human life (*see right*). White stands for the essence of the divine and was reserved for exclusive use in depictions of the Resurrection and Transfiguration of Christ.



The Glory of Ukraine features one of the oldest existing Ukrainian icons, the Mother of God *Hodigitria*, dated 1370 from the Lviv Region. The half-figure of Mary and the small figure of Christ are highly expressive. Mary is depicted with broad sloping shoulders, wearing a mantle with deep geometric folds, visually anchoring the icon, while the figure of Christ is rendered with freedom and confidence. The elongated bodies are out of proportion with the size of the heads, hands and feet. The faces are painted with great skill and delicacy.

Other notable works on display include the *Cross of the Holy Monk Mark of the Caves* (Encolpion, *right*), which has not been on view in the United States since 1997 (*The Glory of Byzantium*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). This rare pectoral reliquary cross dates back to the 11th-century founding of the Monastery of the Caves during the pre-Mongol period of Kyivan Rus'. Unusually large, with Greek inscriptions and intersecting bars at right angles, it is considered to be very distinctive and is believed to have belonged to one of the early monks of the Monastery, Mark, who was responsible for burials in the Caves. He died in the late 11th century and is buried in a grave in the Caves that he dug himself.



Also of note is a rare icon portraying the *Congregation of All the Saints of Pechersk Lavra*, (late 18th-early 19th centuries, Kyiv, *left*). The icon portrays the numerous saints of The Monastery of the Caves, monks and ascetics whose stories are described in the Kyiv-Pechersk Paterik at the beginning of the 13th century. The icon was created to honor the official canonization of these 118 saints, whose remains are kept in the Caves of the Lavra.

Sponsorship:

Major support for MOBIA's exhibitions and programs has been provided by the American Bible

Society and by Howard and Roberta Ahmanson.



This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council. Additional support for *The Glory of Ukraine* has been provided by Robert and Sandra Bowden and the US-Ukraine Business Council.

Publication:

A 176-page hard-bound exhibition catalog features full-page illustrations and individual annotations for each of the 77 objects in the exhibition. ***The Glory of Ukraine: Sacred Images from the 11th to the 19th Centuries*** features two essays written by Ukrainian scholars that explore the "Ukrainian School of Iconography" along with an historical overview of "The Kyiv-Pechersk National Historical and Cultural Preserve."

About FIAE:

The Foundation for International Arts & Education is a non-profit organization. Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, the Foundation was created to help protect and preserve the historical and cultural legacy of the countries of the former Soviet Union. Through its Arts and Exhibitions Program, the Foundation organizes and manages art exhibitions at venues throughout the United States and in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Collateral and educational programs are a key component to each of the Foundation's projects. Financial support for the national tour of this exhibition has been graciously provided by The Museum of National Cultural Heritage Platar, The Industrial Union of Donbass, The Trust for Mutual Understanding, Gail and Michael Yanney, and The Self Reliance (NY) Federal Credit Union.

About the Museum of Biblical Art

Founded in 2005, the Museum of Biblical Art celebrates and interprets art related to the Bible and its cultural legacy in Jewish and Christian traditions through exhibitions, education and scholarship. MOBIA has presented exhibitions ranging from "outsider" artists of the American South to the work of Marc Chagall, Albrecht Dürer, Tobi Kahn and Georges Rouault. Future exhibitions will examine such themes as Andy Warhol's religious influences, Tiffany's magnificent and little-known ecclesiastical designs, and the Bible's impact on African-American artists from the 17th century to the present. To date, MOBIA has provided over 350 workshops, concerts, film screenings, hands-on art sessions, guided tours, and seminars for children and adults. Each year, MOBIA brings free and low-cost workshops of the finest quality to hundreds of public schoolchildren, students and seniors, serving such community groups as the Children's Aid Society, Harlem Children's Zone and the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan. MOBIA's supporters include the American Bible Society, Howard and Roberta Ahmanson, the Robert Lehman Foundation, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.