



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL  
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (MH) Maggie Holtzberg, (LJ) Lian Jue

Accession Numbers:

MH-01-02-FN

Fieldnotes

MH-01-02-D

Audio recordings

MH-01-02-CS

Photographic documentation

- - -M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Date: 1/19/2001

Related Accession Numbers: KK-00-04.

Individual/Group/Event: Xenia Pokrovsky and Marek Czarecki - cross-state apprenticeship

Address: home and studio of Xenia Pokrovsky \_\_\_\_\_

City: Sharon

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Daytime: \_\_\_\_\_

Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: www.izograph.com

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview: kitchen and studio of Xenia Pokrovsky

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Needs (including translation): speaks English fairly well, but is aided by translation

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): Russian orthodox iconography, making of pigments

Traditions noted for follow-up: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Possible Contacts: Chris Gossey, African American iconographer working in the Coptic style, lives in Newton; Galeny [?], doesn't speak English, folk singer of Russian Old Believer laments, lives in apt. with Eugeny Pomerantzeff \_\_\_\_\_

Summary Description: We learned of Xenia Pokrovsky from Lynne Williamson in Connecticut - she had an applicant to our cross state apprenticeship program named Marek Czarniecki who very much wanted to apprentice with Ksenia. They were awarded a grant in the Fall of 2000.

Xenia is widely credited with reviving the writing of traditional Russian icons depicting the images of saints and sacred history in a traditional language of forms, composition, geography, color, style and materials that began in the catacombs of the early church. Icons lie at the heart of Orthodox Christian belief. She had left her career as a research scientist and learned at a time when the old method of writing icons was nearly lost in Russia. Xenia's icons use the works of 15 and 16th century iconographers as a foundation. She uses egg tempera with natural pigments (clay, rocks, ore and semi-precious gems) many of which she grinds and refines herself because of their unavailability. In Soviet Russia, the painting of icons was considered religious propaganda, a crime against the state. "To write icons in Russia, in Soviet Union, it was crime equal to make weapons, to make drugs, to make pornography and to write icons." Xenia risked harassment and arrest by practicing iconography. Ten years ago she and her husband Lev left Russia as political refugees. She has a following here in the States, drawing students from all over. She reiterates traditional prototypes of icons for churches and private clients and has a desire to exhibit her work.

Maggie and intern Lian Jue drove out from Boston to Sharon where Xenia, her husband and son live in a large rambling 2-story house. There was snow on the ground. Xenia greeted us with a smoker's voice, wearing a wool pullover and jeans. Her hair was a wispy grey. She introduced us to her apprentice, Marek Czarniecki, who clearly worships Xenia as an artist and a mentor. We briefly met Xenia's son, who was home dealing with cancer.

We walked through the house, past sheets of sheetrock and dust. The house was being renovated. Just before reaching the kitchen we turned left up a stairway leading to a second floor. The hallway was cluttered with books and boxes. Toward the front of the house we entered a large room with dormered windows: Xenia's studio. There were icons everywhere. Some triptychs, some only partially complete. One wall was completely filled with shelving that held small bottles of pigment. A long workbench held paints and other supplies -- a sheet of thick glass, a mortar and pestle, sculptors tools.