



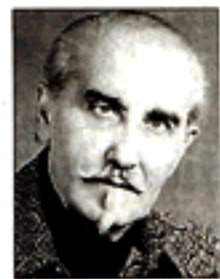
Frank "Wyso" Wysochansky's paintings combined his anthracite coal mining heritage and a unique artistic style, as evident in this piece.

Coal region's canvas

Frank Wyso's legendary art to be featured in exhibit

BY NEWS-ITEM STAFF
SHAMOKIN — The first exhibit of the new year at The Gallery will feature the work of noted folk artist Frank "Wyso" Wysochansky, who, from post-World War II until his death on Sept. 14, 1994, produced more than 5,000 works of art.

He was a man driven to tell the story of the coal heritage of Pennsylvania. Using pen, ink, watercolor, oil, crayon and sculptural forms, Wyso told a story with such passion that his place among America's icons will forever hold true.



WYSOCHANSKY

The exhibit will open with a reception from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Friday. Refreshments will be served and a representative of the Wyso Foundation, as well as James Stevens, author of "Coal Cracker Blues" and other novels, who is helping to organize the exhibit, will be present.

"Frank Wyso is destined to be defined as one of the finest artists of our time," the Frank Wyso Foundation promotes. "Using pen, ink, watercolor, oil, crayon and sculptural forms, Wyso told a story with such passion that his place amongst America's icons will forever hold true."

The exhibit will be open for public viewing through Jan. 19 from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, which are the hours that the Northumberland County Career and Arts Center, where The Gallery is located, is open to the public.

Illustrating the tried and true work ethic that built the United States, Wyso's detail of both the Pennsylvanian spirit and its rich cultural heritage has drawn much attention to his art.

Wysochansky was born April 22, 1915, in Monessen. For most of his life, he lived in Blakely, a small mining town outside of Scranton.

A self-taught artist, his unique style of painting using mixed media captured the life of the coal miner.

He was one of 12 children
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Christmastime artwork was reflective of Wysochansky's bright, multi-media technique.

Artist celebrated Ukrainian Christmas

Editor's Note: The following article appeared in the December issue of Coal People magazine. It is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Memories of a Ukrainian Christmas Eve

BY JAMES STEVENS

Frank Wysochansky, the artist whose work featured the life and times of the anthracite miners of Northeastern Pennsylvania, was part of a family of 12 children. The large Wysochansky clan celebrated Christmas according to the traditions and customs their parents brought to America from western Ukraine.

Frank's sister Olga shared her memories of that special ceremony in an article she wrote late in her life describing Christmas Eve 1935, the last Christmas her family shared with their father. He was killed in a cave-in at a nearby mine on Jan. 16, 1936.

"I remember our last Christmas with Dad in 1935. We had 11 children then and one on the way. We lived in Peckville, Pa., in a



six-room, cold flat that once was a schoolhouse. The Great Depression had already gripped us. Life was Spartan. It was no disgrace to be poor. Our poverty was accepted as a condition of life," Olga wrote.

Two of the family members

were absent that year, with the oldest brother Michael attending a religious order in Canada, and brother Frank away at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in California, sending home what money he could to support the family.

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Exhibit to feature Wyso's works

EXHIBIT, FROM PAGE 1
born to Ukrainian immigrants. His father, Joseph, was a coal miner who, when Wyso was 21 years old, lost his life in a mining accident.

It was Wyso's intimate knowledge of miners and their families that was to influence his art throughout his life. His paintings and sculptures document the tools and working conditions of the anthracite coal mines of northeastern Pennsylvania, as well as the modest means and simple lifestyle of the coal miners' families.

Wyso left the public schools after seventh grade, which may well have allowed him the freedom to develop his unique style. After a brief career in the Marine Corps, he took his first and only art training at the Murray School of Art in Scranton.

His career as an artist began as a freelance cartoonist, largely for the United Mine Workers Journal, between 1955 and 1972. During this time he also developed his bright multi-media technique by applying watercolor, pen and ink and crayon. His subjects, though largely centered on miners and their family lives, also included religious influences and landscapes.

Of modest means, Wyso created art from whatever he could find. His unique reduction technique stemmed from melting down used crayons offered by neighborhood children.

Even the armatures for his figurative sculptures were built using everything from automobile polymer, wire hangers and aluminum foil, to chicken bones and light bulbs. Regardless of his artistic method, his sculptures resonated with a presence of strength, passion and humanity.

"Regardless of his artistic method, his sculptures resonated with a presence of strength, passion, and humanity known only to Wyso," according to publicity from his foundation.

During his career, Wyso won many awards. Particularly noteworthy were his invitations to exhibit in the American Drawing Biennial in Norfolk, Va. He was first invited as one of 150 artists selected in 1969 by John Canady of the New York Times from among 1,425 entries. His second invitation was in 1971 when Henry Pitz of American Artist magazine chose his drawing as one of 126 out of 1,683 pieces entered.

In addition, in 1972, he was listed in *La Revue Moderne des arts et de la vie* as an important American artist, and he was listed in the 1973 edition of *Artists/USA Guide to Contemporary American Art*.

Between 1965 and 1994, Wyso showed in more than 50 exhibits. Among his most successful solo shows were at The Potter's House, Washington, D.C.; Lynn Kottler Galleries, New York City; Maplewood Gallery, Birmingham, Mich.; The Reception Gallery, Nabisco Inc., New Hanover, N.J.; The Balch Institute, Philadelphia; The Everhart Museum, Scranton; George Markle Gallery, Warren, Mich.; The Scranton Anthracite Museum, Scranton; and Chaika Gallery, Warren, Mich.

On the net: www.frankwyso.org



Artist grew up celebrating Ukrainian Christmas

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All the family members old enough to work did so, supplementing their father's mining income with brother Nick's wages from selling lard door to door, Olga's meager earnings from setting hair, and sister Carol's income from domestic work. Together they struggled to survive.

The ritual of the Christmas Eve celebration began with the spreading of the white tablecloth, signifying the swaddling clothes of the infant Jesus, across the dining table. A bed of straw was placed in the exact center of the tablecloth, a reminder of the manger. The centerpiece was a large home-baked braided bread, which represented Christ. A candle was placed in the center of the bread, its light becoming the star of Bethlehem. Straw was scattered under the table and on the kitchen floor, to the dismay of the older children.

"We would remind Dad that he was in America now. Good grief! What would our friends think?" Olga said.

12-course meal

The 12-course meal, one course for each apostle, began with blessed bread and honey. "Dad dipped bread into the honey, bringing it up to his mouth, while saying 'Christ is born,' to which we all replied, 'Let us glorify him.'"

The meatless menu consisted of the bread and honey, a Christmas wheat dish called kutia, made with honey, raisins and nuts; cabbage soup and rye bread; varenyky or dumplings filled with potato, cabbage or prunes; cabbage rolls with rice and mushrooms; fish, peas, mushrooms, rice with prunes and nuts; fruit compote; non-dairy boil cake; tea, soda and nuts.

Between courses, the family sang carols. At the end of the meal, all exchanged hugs and Christmas greetings. The dishes were washed, and the tableware bound with wisps of straw and placed under the table, symbolizing the togetherness that binds a family.

Simple gifts

Christmas morning the children assembled in the warm kitchen where their Christmas stockings held their gifts — simple gifts of nuts and candy and sometimes an orange. In some years, a well-to-do neighbor might bring a box of treats for the family to



share.

Two services were held at the church, "said Olga. 'A High Mass and a Low Mass. The adults alternated their attendance. The kids stayed home for lack of warm clothing for the long walk in the bitter cold.'"

Following the death of the family patriarch, the Christmas Eve celebrations continued, but with a sadness. The coming of World War II helped turn the economy around, and the Wysochansky family managed to buy a seven-room house in Blakely with two bathrooms, a true luxury. Three of the girls were married by 1948, and each had a child of her own. Olga attempted to persuade her mother to abolish the family Christmas Eve gatherings to alleviate the pressure and tensions of the holidays.

"As long as I live and am able, we

shall observe this beautiful tradition as a family unit," her mother said. "Your children will remember this when they're on their own."

Brother assumes role

Giving in to their mother's will, the grown children and their children assembled for the ceremony in 1948, 12 years after the death of their father. As they prepared to serve the meal, they heard footsteps on the front porch.

"There was a sudden stillness as our eyes darted toward the door. It opened slowly, letting in a gust of cold air. We were all astounded to see our brother Michael, a monk, from Alberta, Canada, standing tall and magnificent in his heavy overcoat and cosack cap, covered with soft flakes of snow."

After a round of greetings and celebration, the family turned to the table,

with Michael, the oldest, assuming his place at the head of the table. For the first time in 14 years, the whole family was united at Christmas Eve.

"Mother's lucid blue eyes glowed like lighted lamps ... her countenance revealed a sense of relief after discarding a heavy burden. There was also a kind of complete authority taking over that was once my father's when he lived. My brother's presence was a special gift to Mother and the family. With very deep emotion, we all witnessed another joyful Christmas," Olga remembered.

"Today, regardless of the greater sophistication and higher standard of living, we are proud to see our own married children carry on in this same tradition that has been passed on to them."