



THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CORNCOBS TO COSMONAUTS:

Redefining the Holidays during the Soviet Era

November 9, 2018-January 27, 2019

CLINTON, MA - The Museum of Russian Icons will be presenting ***Corncobs to Cosmonauts: Redefining the Holidays during the Soviet Era***, an exhibition transforming the Museum's West Gallery into a Russian Winter Wonderland from November 9, 2018-January 27, 2019. The centerpiece of the show will be more than 150 Soviet-era ornaments displayed alongside various-sized and decorated "New Year's Trees," together with holiday toys, books, and cards.

Collector **Frank Sciacca** donated the majority of the ornaments to the museum. The ornaments depict a variety of non-religious objects that were important to both the average Russian citizen and the Soviet state. These include folk heroes and cartoon characters, funny clowns and chubby babies, state emblems and objects that celebrate the productivity of farms and factories.

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the anti-religion Bolsheviks discouraged Christmas and New Year celebrations in the U.S.S.R. since the gift giving and extravagance that accompanied the holidays came to symbolize the greed and excess of the aristocracy and bourgeois classes. The tradition of celebrating *Novy God* (New Year) re-appeared in 1935 as a secular holiday that would symbolize Soviet children's prosperity and happiness.

The New Year's tree, or *yolka*, was repurposed as the primary symbol of the celebration but with all religious references removed. The Red Army's ruby star replaced the tree-topping star of Bethlehem; and the tree was decorated with non-religious ornaments depicting animals, plants, Kremlin architecture, airplanes, and the communist hammer and sickle. After the Soviets launched Sputnik 1 in 1957, figures of cosmonauts, rockets, satellites, and planets became popular. Ornaments that celebrated the country's achievements in agriculture—like peppers, grapes, and carrots—were sold during Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's time; the most popular being corncobs because of Khrushchev's infamous "corn campaign" which he touted as a solution to livestock shortages. The custom of decorating Christmas trees had initially been introduced to Russia by Peter the Great after he visited Europe during the 1700's.

The Russian fairytale figure, *Ded Moroz* (Grandfather Frost) was said to travel in a horse-drawn sleigh accompanied by his beautiful granddaughter, *Snegurochka* (The Snow Maiden), to deliver gifts to children to place under the New Year's tree. He carries a staff, wears *valenki*, or felt boots, and is carried across Russia in a *troika*, or a vehicle led by three horses, instead of a sleigh pulled by reindeer.

In the early years of the Soviet regime, *Ded Moroz* was considered an unacceptable link to old Russia. In later years he became the symbol of *Novy God*, a move taken by the government as a way to stop the advance of the western tradition of Santa Claus. Ornaments and statues of *Ded Moroz*, sometimes with *Snegurochka*, became favorite decorations for New Year's trees and family rooms during winter festivities.

Russians, who account for 39 percent of the world's Orthodox Christians, were allowed to celebrate Christmas once again after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, old habits die hard and the Christmas festivities, held on January 7 in accordance with the old Julian calendar, are still overshadowed by big New Year celebrations, which are more like the Western Christmas.

RELATED EVENTS

Opening reception: November 8, 6:00-8:00pm, Members free, Nonmembers \$5, RSVP by calling the Museum: 978.598.5000 x121.

Join us for a family-friendly opening reception. We'll have exhibit tours, a short talk on the Russian New Year by collector Frank Sciacca, hot chocolate, holiday cookies, and crafts.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The Museum of Russian Icons inspires the appreciation and study of Russian culture by collecting and exhibiting icons and related objects; igniting the interest of national and international audiences; and offering interactive educational programs. The Museum serves as a leading center for research and scholarship through the Center for Icon Studies and other institutional collaborations. It is the only museum in the US dedicated to Russian icons, and it is the largest collection of icons outside of Russia.

Museum hours: Tue. - Fri., 11AM to 4PM, first Thurs of the month to 8PM, Saturday and Sunday 11AM to 5PM, closed Mondays.

Admission: Adults \$10, seniors (59+) \$7, Students \$5, Children (3-7) \$5, Children under 3 Free.

For more information, please visit museumofrussianicons.org.