

U.S. Artist Earns Polish Accolades

Pittsburgh Artist Dave Motak, the leading expert on the szopka art form in the United States, was recently honored in Krakow at the 68th annual Szopka Competition (pronounced: "shop-kah"). The first foreigner to enter a szopka in the annual competition, Motak earned an "Honorable Mention for Artistic Merit" in the category medium-sized szopki.



The award was presented to Motak on December 10 by Michal Niezabytowski, executive director of the City of Krakow History Museum, at the annual Szopka Awards Ceremony in the Krzystofory Palace on Krakow's historic Rynek (market square). In addition to this special presentation, Motak was awarded a prize of 1,400 Polish zloty (approx. \$500) for his entry.

A folk craft with roots in the Middle Ages, when they originated as puppet theaters in the churches of Krakow, Poland, the szopka or Krakow creche, is an art form that transforms ordinary materials such as wood, cardboard, foiled paper and ribbon into ornate miniature architectural constructions.

Motak entered his szopka, entitled "From Pittsburgh to Krakow," as a tribute to his many szopka students. Since Motak began his szopka art education project in 2003, nearly 800 children, adults and families have taken his szopka building workshops around the United States. In lieu of the traditional "lalki" or dolls that are part of a traditional szopka, Motak featured images of many of his students in his prize-winning construction. Each of these American szopka makers are featured holding the szopka that they made at Motak's Krakow Creche Workshop classes.

The prize-winning szopka, which measured over 40 inches tall and lighted with European 220 volt electrical bulbs, was topped by a traditional Polish eagle, flanked with Polish and American flags, as well as hand-crafted coats of arms of Krakow and Pittsburgh. Motak notes that the first American entry was very popular with the Cracovians and was a big hit during the annual Szopka Parade on Krakow's Market Square. The Pittsburgh entry was covered on Krakow radio and was also featured in the local print media. Motak notes that getting the szopka to Krakow was quite tricky, as he had to build the fragile pieces in sections to be packed in two suitcases which were shipped as checked luggage. He then assembled the sections and installed the lighting in Krakow the night before the competition. "Shipping the szopka was a nail-biting proposition, and locating the European lights was quite a task," Motak notes. "Getting the szopka back from Poland will be the next challenge!"

Motak's piece will be on exhibit at the Krakow History Museum until the end of February. Motak also serves as director of communications for the Polish Falcons of America, headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA. For further images and information, you can visit Motak's web site at www.cracowcrafts.com.

Members of the Polish American Congress Youth Groups Perform During Christmas Season Events



St. Adalbert Polish Language School students perform the traditional Polish Christmas Show "Jaselka" at St. Adalbert parish hall in the Port Richmond section of Philadelphia, PA.



Students from Adam Mickiewicz Polish Language School perform during their annual Christmas Show held at the Associated Polish Home Ballroom in Northeast Philadelphia, PA.



Our Lady of Czestochowa Polish Language School students perform the traditional Polish Christmas Show "Jaselka" at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown, PA.



The Polish Scouts "Harcerstwo" perform a traditional Polish Christmas Show "Jaselka" in the Shrine's Visitors Center at America's Czestochowa in Doylestown, PA.

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