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Library Award
Worker & Kolkhoz Woman

My *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* research paper is the culmination of two month-long research in the Fall 2010 semester and careful writing, so as not to make claims I cannot support on such a sensitive subject. My extensive personal research was supplemented by the relevant knowledge I gained in Professor June Hargrove's 'Materials and Techniques of Sculpture 1750-1950' (ARTH488M) course, for which this paper was written. The topic came as a surprise to many and my choices behind it were anything but random. While many of my classmates chose topics from the Western sculptural tradition, which is more accessible and rich in handily available resources, I elected to challenge myself with a subject that has not been researched and written about "to death," if you will, and is even less known to the general public. I enjoy presenting novel ideas and introducing my audience to artworks they may not have encountered before. The monumental Soviet sculpture of a Worker and Kolkhoz Woman appealed to me on many different levels, and its multiple facets would require several research approaches that I embraced.

I had come to know this work of art, which some would rather not classify as such for politically and ideologically motivated reasons, during my years living in the post-Soviet republic of Armenia, where the image was still widely circulated years after it lost its relevancy with the break-up of the Union. As I mention in my paper, the monument was used in the opening credits of all Soviet movies produced by the state film studio - MosFilm, and I had first encountered it through such viewings as a child. The image was still present in my mind as I was looking for an original topic to thoroughly analyze, and further inquiry confirmed it as a subject rich in questions that I was eager to find answers to.

As you read the paper, you will discover the many aspects of the work that I cover, ranging from its history to building materials and complicated construction, and culminating in the various ideologies it had been manipulated to support over the decades. Each of these areas required separate research and methods. A simple query of 'Worker and Kolkhoz Woman' on the UMD library catalog brings up nothing, so a more topical search, such as for Soviet sculpture or monumental art, was necessary. I had begun with a broad search for artistic trends in Socialist Realism, which this work falls under, to gain a basic understanding for its iconography and purpose. The art library became an invaluable asset, accommodating me for countless long evenings sifting through the racks and discerning sources that would be of most use. Most of the sources I had used were books written on the subject or covering it with necessary relevance to my own concentration. This process required me to be able to judge the most useful source on a given issue, while consulting it with others to ensure that I am getting correct and supported information. Most general books on the topic barely touched on this particular work, but I was able to take at least some factual information from each that was missing from others. I disqualified books that only recounted already researched information, and tried to narrow down to publications that cited primary sources. I was fortunate to find a biographical book on the sculptor – Vera Mukhina, in the library's off-site shelving that covered in much detail the period of the conception of this work, which came to be her most-famous. The book was in Russian, and this would come to be the case for many of my sources. Fortunately I read and understand the Russian language well; otherwise most of the information would be impossible to access in English.

Other explorations such as the materials used and the construction of the stainless-steel monument would lead me to consult more technical sources that disclosed such facts as it being the first sculpture to use the spot-welding technique in its construction. In this regard, online scholarly databases proved to be invaluable in finding technical info about construction trends of the time. The library online catalog's 'subject search' feature was especially useful, and saved me countless hours of having to go through pages of materials even remotely relevant to the keywords. I did meticulously read each listing, since in my prior experience even a seemingly irrelevant source pertinent may contain pertinent information. I did search the library's digital collections, but unfortunately did not find anything of use to my particular topic. Research port, on the other hand, became my virtual home, and the abundance of varied databases ensured that besides just art historical journals, I also searched history, sociology and political databases, as the monument had implications far beyond its pure aesthetic values. In addition to the UM library system, WorldCat was constantly used to find books and documents in nearby library collections, including but not limited to, the Library of Congress, American University Library, and DC Public Libraries. I also found it useful to do basic online searches, specifically for recent news articles, as part of my paper was to uncover the current implications of the monument in post-Soviet society. Mentioning the copy service the library offers may seem unnecessary, but it did afford me a means of using information found in non-circulatory materials.

I prefer to work independently, but on occasion I did advise with the professor to ensure that the research was headed in the right direction, so that I was not ambitiously getting carried away with the abundance of information I had amassed. I did not consult a reference librarian for this paper, as I did not find a need for it. I am very well familiar with the research databases and how to utilize them to my full advantage. However, I always knew that if I was to encounter a problem in my search, there was always a courteous librarian there to assist me. I am very grateful especially to the student staff of the art library, which on many occasions was able to locate certain books for me that appeared to be missing or misplaced. Interlibrary loan was crucial in obtaining materials that I otherwise would not have been able to consult due to geographic and time limitations.

This grueling process proved to be extremely challenging, especially in organizing the varied information, and allowed me to improve my scholarly skills in both research and the analysis of the found sources. This was my most ambitious research project to date, and it would not have been possibly without the massive library collection and the kind people who maintain it. This experience will undoubtedly serve me well as I prepare to undertake a senior honors thesis, and will certainly prove to be vital in the graduate school environment that I plan to enter. I am extremely grateful for all the resources the university offers, and for offering a library system I can be a proud user of.