Ivan Bobkov | Ukraine | Ceramics

Discovering unexpected beauty in Ukrainian clay

The art of master potter and ceramicist Ivan Bobkov represents “the unity of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine–Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.” Products, made of terra cotta or Ukrainian clay, are created on a potter’s wheel then engraved or hand-painted with glaze or engobe. Engobe is a specialty in Ukrainian pottery as the land holds deep deposits of high-quality red, red-brown, and light-grey clays. Ornek ornamentation, in addition to its artistic and aesthetic value, is encoded with magical content and symbolism to protect against evil forces.

In 2008, Ornek ornament art was included on the National List of Elements of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ukraine. As a master of his craft, Ivan has exhibited widely throughout Europe, both in solo exhibitions and as part of international festivals.

In May of 1944, Stalin ordered the deportation of Crimean Tatars from their homeland, an act of ethnic cleansing that affected hundreds of thousands–mostly women, children and the elderly. This action resulted in the loss of traditional arts knowledge the revival of which—including jewelry, pottery, weaving, and embroidery–began in the early 1990s.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST