

Hand-Carved Bas-Relief of Stalin, by V. Astalosh, artist signed, dated 16 February 1945.

The artwork is carved in a solid slab of linden-tree wood measuring 15" x 23 1/2" x 1 1/4" and weighing close to 6 lbs. The artwork is finished with a coating of clear lacquer. The name plaque under the bas-relief reads "Supreme Commander Marshal of the USSR I.V. Stalin." The artist's last name is carved at the lower right-hand corner of the artwork. We spell his name "Astalosh" phonetically, although his name was most likely spelled "Asztalos", a common Hungarian last name meaning "carpenter." The inscription carved into the reverse side reads "Work of V.M. Astalosh, 5th-year student of the Mukachevo Teachers' Seminary. In Svalyava, 16 February 1945. Transcarpathian Ukraine." To put all this on the map, Svalyava is a small town in Mukachevo District, Uzhgorod Region, in the west of Western Ukraine, mere miles from the border with Hungary.

In very good condition. The obverse shows several scuffs, contact points and scratches, most of which are small and unobtrusive, with the exception of the misfortunate horizontal scratch across Stalin's jaw. Nevertheless, the large size, deep relief of the carving, and diversity of surfaces dominates over the spots of wear, placing them firmly in the background of the viewer's attention. The board is solid, showing no cracks or curvature despite the reverse being unfinished.

The location this carving was made in, the time it was made, and the educational institution its author belonged to, come together in a fascinating context. Transcarpathian Ukraine, had forever been a cauldron of multiple cultures, languages and religions. In 1945, it had just recently been "Sovietized" whereas most ethnic groups populating it, were not very happy with it. All Western Ukraine, and especially, the hub of Transcarpathian Ukraine, were against socialism, atheism, and most of all, against losing their independence under the Soviet rule. While WW2 ended in 1945 in Europe, nationalist formations continued their struggle for independence against Red Army, NKVD, and then MGB until well into the 1950s. Mr Astalosh, being a student at the Mukachevo Russian Orthodox Teachers' Seminary, subjected himself to a certain degree of risk by carving Stalin's bas-relief. What motivated him to do it? We do not want to delve too deep into guesswork and assumptions, but wouldn't this carving make a delectable research project for a history buff?

Please note that the 1-ft. ruler in our photo is for size reference.

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\$550.00





