
Lydia Bodnar-Balahuttrak

Virtual Art Guest Speaker Series
September 23, 2020
O'Kane Gallery
University of Houston-Downtown





Notes: #1

And Europe Was Silent

On Introduction panel

And Europe Was Silent, 48 x 96 inches, print media collage, oil, chalks / distressed canvas, 2015

As soon as the Olympic Games ended in Russia, Putin put his land-grab plan into action and annexed Crimea, at the same time moving Russian troops to the Eastern Ukrainian border and then across the border in an invasion of Ukraine. Europe and the West undertook virtually no action to prevent these events and protect Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. In 1931, at the time of the Stalin-orchestrated famine-genocide in Ukraine, the Ukrainian poet Oleksandr Oles' wrote "Remembrance", lamenting the deaths in Ukraine and pleading for help. I copied his poem onto the surface of accrued collaged reports of the latest Russian aggressions. Each stanza ends with the refrain "And Europe was silent", mournfully echoing Ukraine's plight today.



Notes: #3

Map of Ukraine

Map of Ukraine

I am Ukrainian-American, a child of World War II refugees from Ukraine. Like many Americans, I am defined by two cultures – that of my displaced Ukrainian family, and that of the U.S.A where I was born, raised, and continue to live and work.

Two trips to Ukraine were pivotal turning points for me in my creative work and world view.

- In 1991, I visited Ukraine for the first time. In the cities of L'viv and Kyiv, the capital, I saw the destructive vestiges of the Soviet regime, but also witnessed the beginnings of a national reclamation. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union had dissolved and Ukraine declared independence. Since then, I have been inspired to “bear witness” to historic and current global events that deeply concern Ukraine and the U.S.A.

- In 1996, I visited the Chernobyl Zone. I was awed by nature's power of regeneration and healing after the 1986 nuclear cataclysm. The images of tangled vines, twisted branches, and curtains of trees, have become recurring visual metaphors in my work.

The map serves to locate Ukraine, the largest country in Europe, and to point out her neighboring countries and her vast geographic range, including the peninsula of Crimea in the Black Sea and the East Ukrainian cities that have been (still are) invaded by Russia.

Pandemic Lamentations, Part 2



52 x 144 inches
print media collage, charcoal, pastel / paper
2020



Notes: #5

***Pandemic Lamentations,
Part II***

Pandemic Lamentations, Part II, 52 x 144 inches, print media collage, charcoal, pastel / paper, 2020

This work is the second of my 3-part elegy recounting the pandemic as it unfolds - the loss of lives, the social, political, and economic upheavals. *Part II* centers on May 2020, marking the then incalculable human toll of 100,000 deaths in the U.S. from the coronavirus. Poet T. S. Eliot's words are worked into the portrayed hazy, fragile terrain.



The Human Toll

America can afford a world-class health system. Why don't we have one?

The America We Need

Honoring the dead

Unemployment 'literally off the charts'

Tracking an Outbreak

7 days could have saved 30,000 U.S. lives

ET: Plague? Grim in Aid To Beware of 1918 Flu Pandemic

We're still in danger

ELRIC

Don Paul Estimated

million of death (as Trump will arrest)

U.S. already on verge of trouble

A slow restart

'We have to get over the fear'

Despite plagues, we are...
necessarily in that tree, they
Hill House, also

the accident had four pairs

still in wool-fal state



Notes: #7

**Close-up view of
*Pandemic Lamentations,
Part II***

**Close-up view - right-hand section of
*Pandemic Lamentations, Part II***

I've collaged newspaper articles, headlines, and photos that carry the story of the pandemic, and have drawn flickering flames of fire and prickly branches meant to burn and nick at our consciousness. T. S. Eliot's words evoke hopefulness: "And all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

Will the Grass Grow Over It?



48 x 96 inches
print media collage,
oil, wax / linen
2014



Notes: #9

Will The Grass Grow Over It?

Will the Grass Grow Over It? 48 x 96 inches,
print media collage, oil, wax / linen, 2014

This is an elegy for all the victims of genocide. A ground saturated with text and images of Stalin's 1932-33 Holodomor in Ukraine is overgrown with blades of grass and shielded with the words of writer Vassily Grossman, a Holodomor witness. He asks: "Can it really be that no one will ever answer for everything that has happened? That all will be forgotten...? That the grass will grow over it?"



THE ANIMALS TO GO

THE GRASS WILL GROW

THE GRASS WILL GROW



Notes: #11

Close-up view of *Will The Grass Grow Over It?*

Close-up view of *Will the Grass Grow Over It?*

Holodomor is the Ukrainian name given to the tragic 1932-33 famine-genocide orchestrated by Josef Stalin onto Soviet Ukraine. It means “death by starvation”.

7-10 million Ukrainians died of starvation in an artificial famine, victims to Stalin’s Soviet collectivization policies. Stalin wanted to deal a “crushing blow” to the backbone of Ukraine, her rural population.

Denial of the Holodomor by Soviet authorities was echoed at the time by many prominent Western journalists, like Walter Duranty of *The New York Times*. The Soviet Union adamantly refused any outside assistance because the regime officially denied that there was any famine. Journalists Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones were among the few who reported the truth of this genocide. A recent film directed by Agnieszka Holland, *Mr. Jones*, addresses the lies and coverups.


Hearts-a-bustin'

50.5 x 65 inches

print media collage, oil, wax / canvas

2015





Notes: #13

Hearts-a-Bustin'

Hearts-a-bustin' , 50.5 x 65 inches, print media collage, oil, wax / canvas, 2015

My visit to the Chernobyl Zone in 1996, ten years after the nuclear explosion, left me struck by nature's power of reclamation. I saw nature spreading her healing mantle over the dust and decay. Vines and tree limbs were forging their way in through broken windows, saplings were breaking through concrete floors and taking root. Those images of nature have become visual motifs in my work, metaphors for healing and renewal, as in this work that speaks of death and war games.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: "And for all this, nature is never spent; there lives the dearest freshness deep down things..." Despite everything, in the face of destruction and loss, our human instinct for truth and beauty arises from deep down things, regenerates and creates anew.

Thorns and Falling Idols



97 x 152 inches
(diptych)
print media
collage, charcoal
2016



Notes: #15

Thorns and Falling Idols

Thorns and Falling Idols 97 x 152 in. (diptych),
print media collage, charcoal, pastel / canvas,
2016

This large diptych brings together some pivotal recent events in Ukraine since the country's declaration of independence in 1991. The collaged ground holds a medley of post-Soviet news reports and photos, watched over by hovering idols, those icons of the communist Soviet system. The huge statues don't look so threatening now. They're ghostly, foggy images. But they are not gone, still present in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, glimpsed through a scrim of prickly thorns and branches.





Notes: #17
Close-up view of
Thorns and Falling Idols

Close-up view of *Thorns and Falling Idols*

A closer view shows the drawing marks made with charcoal and pastels over the collaged ground of print news.

Barren Fruit

Collection: The Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, Texas

105 x 65 inches

print media collage, charcoal, pastel / canvas

2013





Notes: #19
Barren Fruit

Barren Fruit, 105 x 65 inches, print media collage, charcoal, pastel / canvas, 2013

Collection: The Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, Texas

This work is my meditation on the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine and its 2010 aftermath. The collaged ground of print news, text, and photos, supports my drawing of a metaphoric tree with expansive trunk and limbs, soaring crown, and vestigial round fruit. Years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this peaceful activist action protesting a rigged election and calling for free and independent elections grew into a strong movement. There was hope and potential for democratic reform. But by the 2010 election, it had been corrupted and co-opted. Nonetheless, despite the barren fruit, the calls for democratic reform still reverberate.

You Are What You Are Fed (Nests Series)

9 x 9 inches

charcoal, Russian ruble coin / paper

2019





Notes: #21

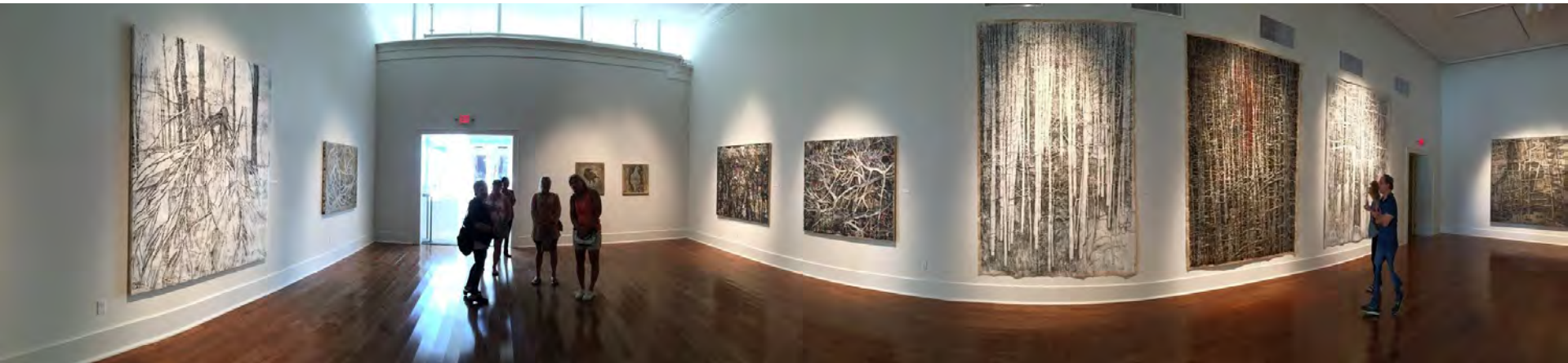
You Are What You Are Fed (Nests series)

You Are What You Are Fed (Nests series),
9 x 9 inches, charcoal, Russian ruble coin /
paper, 2019

This is one of my ongoing “Nests” series, in which I incorporate a fable-like language in which a menagerie of animals act as stand-ins for very human dramas. Here a nestling opens her beak to receive a Russian ruble coin, her body already drawn over Russian currency. As the title suggests, you become what you are fed, but only if you choose to ingest it. We must be vigilant and question the information we are fed.

Discourse

Solo exhibition, 2016, at The Galveston Arts Center, TX
from 133 x 83 inches to 30 x 28 inches
all work: print media collage, mixed media / canvas





Notes: #23

Discourse - solo exhibit

Discourse solo exhibition, 2016, at The Galveston Arts Center, TX

from 133 x 83 inches to 30 x 28 inches, all work:
print media collage, mixed media / canvas

The title "*Discourse*" underscores what is at the heart of my art-making. In all the works in this show, I strive to visually evoke - not just document - the stories of pivotal world events. Each piece begins as an extensive collage of clipped newspaper articles, headlines, and photos, arranged in a sort of self-perpetuating dialogue, over which I apply charcoal, paint, and wax. The work is layered in time and materials, oscillating between found text and rendered imagery. Some elements are concealed, others revealed. The collaged work investigates the written word as well as the general nature of disseminated information. Each exhibition is an opportunity to initiate discourse and challenge the viewer to assess what is actually revealed and what is disguised.