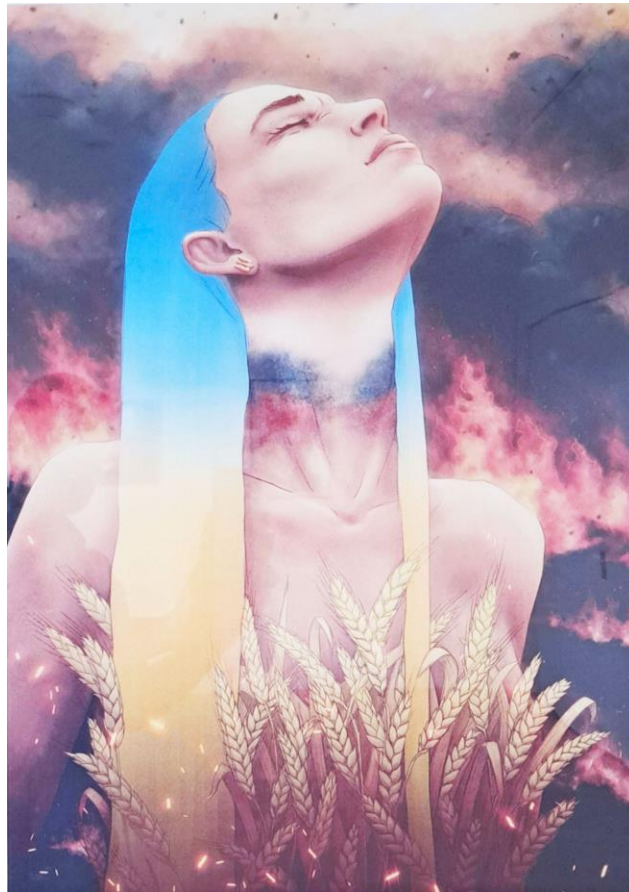


MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE Exhibition

Encapsulating how we bring our past into our future, the Vytik art collective's thematic exploration of hope and cultural identity as it evolved under the pall of war, built upon and pushed the boundaries of what constitutes Ukrainian art

By Ayah Victoria McKhail

From August 13 to September 15, 2023, Toronto's Shevchenko Museum held a momentous multidisciplinary group exhibition of contemporary artistic works, which manifested the ingenuity of 13 Ukrainian newcomer artists. Their awe-inspiring creativity permeated the halls of the museum, leaving an indelible impression on everyone who absorbed the magnitude and meaning embedded in the artistic works on display.



Anastasiia Chumak, Ukraine in the Flames of War, 2022, 70 X 50, digital procreate.

Established in February 2023, the Vytik art collective was co-founded by Iryna Kolotylo, an art manager; Marta Kolotylo, an art teacher; and Violetta Skrypnyk, an art historian. Co-curated by the three women, with Olha Turko, an artist, playing a pivotal role as assistant curator, the Memories of the Future exhibition was the Vytik art collective's inaugural and an unprecedented success. As Iryna Kolotylo explained, "Our goal was to create a platform for Ukrainian newcomer artists to connect with one another; integrate themselves into the local art scene; and to use the power of art to express their innermost thoughts and feelings about Ukraine in a poignant way."

Ohannes Khachatrian, a Ukrainian with Armenian roots, found himself drawn to Anastasiia Chumak's Ukraine in the Flames of War. The striking digital image depicts a woman with a look of anguish on her face. Gazing upwards, seemingly to the heavens above, she's surrounded by a veritable hell on earth. Encircled by flames, there are explosions. Debris flies and smoke billows. Yet in the midst of this destruction, emblems of Ukraine appear, representing what is sacred. The woman's hair is part blue and part yellow, just like the country's flag. And spikes of wheat, a staple in the nation, are fanned across her chest. As Khachatrian shared, "It's important to recognize the context in which this piece of art was created. As the nation was plunged into a horrific reality, it reflects the artist's frame of mind at a time of intense upheaval."

According to Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, the museum's director, the exhibition garnered widespread interest, both among Toronto's Ukrainian community and the broader public, who sought to gain a greater understanding of the devastation that lingers in the aftermath of fleeing one's homeland in the face of war and how new dreams are built in an adopted land. "With the modern music being in tune with the art, the exhibition was truly unique because it unravelled the sentiments and experiences of a younger generation of Ukrainians at various stages as the war unfolded. By elevating their art, it amplified their voices and gave them an opportunity to share their perspectives. It also united the spirit of Ukrainians."

Although the artists are from different parts of Ukraine and have come together under difficult circumstances, their connection to one another has symbolically put the pieces of their nation back together. They are: Mariia Charuta, Michael Chernov, Anastasiia Chumak, Roman Dariichuk, Vlad Kholodnyi, Marta Kolotylo, Vladlen Movchan, Yuliia Myroniuk, Margo Puhachenko, Margaryta Savina, Daria Tischenko-Zhuravel, Nadiya Voloshchuk and Mykola Zhuravel.



Daria Tischenko-Zhuravel, Maple Leaf, 2/10 31.3" x 48", photo on metal.

Daria Tischenko-Zhuravel's Maple Leaf, which is a photo on metal, stood out as a tribute to Canada. Having arrived in March 2022, a month after the war broke out, she was inspired to use the outline of the Canadian flag to depict an abundance of hands intertwined with one another. Grasping onto and uplifting one another, it's emblematic of Canada's unity, diversity and strength. "It's a reflection of the warm embrace I received by so many Canadians who wanted to help me and the Ukrainian people."

Anastasiya Kurylo, a journalist who volunteers at the Shevchenko Museum, found herself captivated by a series of photographs entitled, Woman of Strength, by Yuliia Myroniuk. The three images depict a woman in distinct poses enveloped in the stark beauty of nature. She's contemplative, assertive and grounded. "The woman strikes me as being very strong; just like Ukrainian women. And although she has an air of modernity about her, she's still drawn to tradition, which is something I can relate to."

Myroniuk, who's deeply connected to Ukraine's natural beauty, particularly its rivers and mountains, captured the serenity nature inspires in an unplanned photo shoot. "These photographs reflect our connection to the earth; the calmness that's instilled in us in the open air; the joy we feel in the sun; and the grounding effect of having your feet firmly immersed in soil. Ultimately, these photographs are about belief and hope."



Yuliia Myroniuk, Photo from the series: "Woman of Strength", 2022, 12" X 18", photo

Olena Asatrian, a Ukrainian with Armenian roots, marvelled at Margaryta Savina's batik silk scarves. Summer depicts a pot of assorted flowers and Fog reveals a panoramic view of exquisite white flowers enmeshed among intricate green leaves, with mountains in the distance. "The technique the artist used is fascinating and a source of intrigue to me. The brightly-coloured flowers in Summer really stand out and the mountains in Fog remind me of Armenia's mountains."



Margaryta Savina, Summer, 96 X 104 cm, slink, batik.



Margaryta Savina, Fog, 96 X 104 cm, silk, batik.

Iris Sopinka, a retired French teacher who volunteers at the Shevchenko Museum and is an amateur art collector, was inspired by the glimmer of hope she found in Marta Kolotylo's acrylic on canvas painting, *In Between*. Predominately black and bordered with gray and a little purple, the viewer is drawn into a blue passageway with yellow at the bottom. "What's most compelling to me is the precision of the lines. The colours of the Ukrainian flag appear and the yellow indicates that light is coming through, so there's hope."



Marta Kolotylo, *In Between*, 30" X 30", acrylic.

The piece speaks to the places and spaces we occupy, both physically and psychologically, according to Marta Kolotylo, who honed in on the main components of her painting. "The gray represents the memories of the past we all have; the yellow signifies the present and the blue, like the sky, soars us high into the future."



Michael Chernov, Gin & Tonic, 2023, 40" X 51", oil on canvas with spray painting.

That future looks bright, according to Danylo Glyntchak, a portrait artist who's known for his paintings of prominent members of the Ukrainian community. Marvelling at the experimental nature of the artistic works on display, he pointed to Michael Chernov's oil on canvas painting, *Gin & Tonic*. Marked with twirls of black spray paint, the focal point is the two bottles. A can of soda dangles in a glass, with two other ones in the background, along with a lime.

Roman Dariichuk's collage, *Big city Danec'*, which features a couple clad in Hutsul-style clothing superimposed on a map of Ontario, also caught his eye. "Each outstanding piece commands attention. It's evident there are a lot of ideas here, which this younger generation can build on. This is a good start for the Vytik art collective. Clearly, each artist has potential."



Roman Dariichuk, Big city Danetc', 52 X 62 cm, collage.

Maria Antoniv, an artist, graphic designer and president of the Literary and Artistic Association Canada Branch (LATCA), which is a collective of artists, musicians and writers who collaborate on opportunities to present their work, while undertaking philanthropic endeavours to support Ukraine, agreed. “I’m positive each artist will easily find his or her own way in Canada’s creative spaces. Based on everything I absorbed, they all had distinct achievements, which captured their artistic visions and unique styles of expression. Executed at such a high level, I’m eager to see what comes next and their new exhibitions.”

Those are welcome words to Iryna Kolotylo, who's keen on ushering contemporary art into the public domain and making it more accessible. Already, several Vytik art collective members have been facilitating a range of exciting workshops at the Shevchenko Museum. "We plan to continue exhibitions in various spaces: from coffee shops to tattoo shops. At the end of the year, we'll launch an 'open call' for potential cooperation on a future project. In the meantime, when there are no exhibitions, we'll hold art tours, workshops and urban sketching at a café."



About Ayah Victoria McKhail

Ayah Victoria McKhail is a Toronto-based journalist who is passionate about arts and culture reporting. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, such as the *Literary Review of Canada*, the *WholeNote*, and newspapers affiliated with the East Coast's SaltWire Network.