

Мистецтво  
самозображення  
Лігії  
Богнар-  
Балагутрак.  
Мирослава Мудрак /  
Portraying Selfhood:  
The Art of Lydia  
Bodnar-Balahutrak.  
Myroslava M. Mudrak

Лігія Богнар народилася в Америці, в родині українських емігрантів, які були змушені покинути рідну землю в часі Другої світової війни. Доля повела їх у Сполучені Штати, де в священницькій родині (гідуся мисткині був греко-католицьким священником) Лігія Богнар пізнавала звичаї і культуру українського народу на далекій відстані від рідної землі. Виростала на мріях своїх родичів, які прагнули колись повернутись на Батьківщину. Надіялась і вона, що побачить сю далеку країну своїх прародителів, – мрія, яка сповнилася тільки в 1991 році, коли Україна стала знову незалежною, самостійною державою. Художниці пощастило побувати ще двічі на землі своїх пращурів, взявши участь у співбесідах з українськими мистцями – своїми сучасниками.

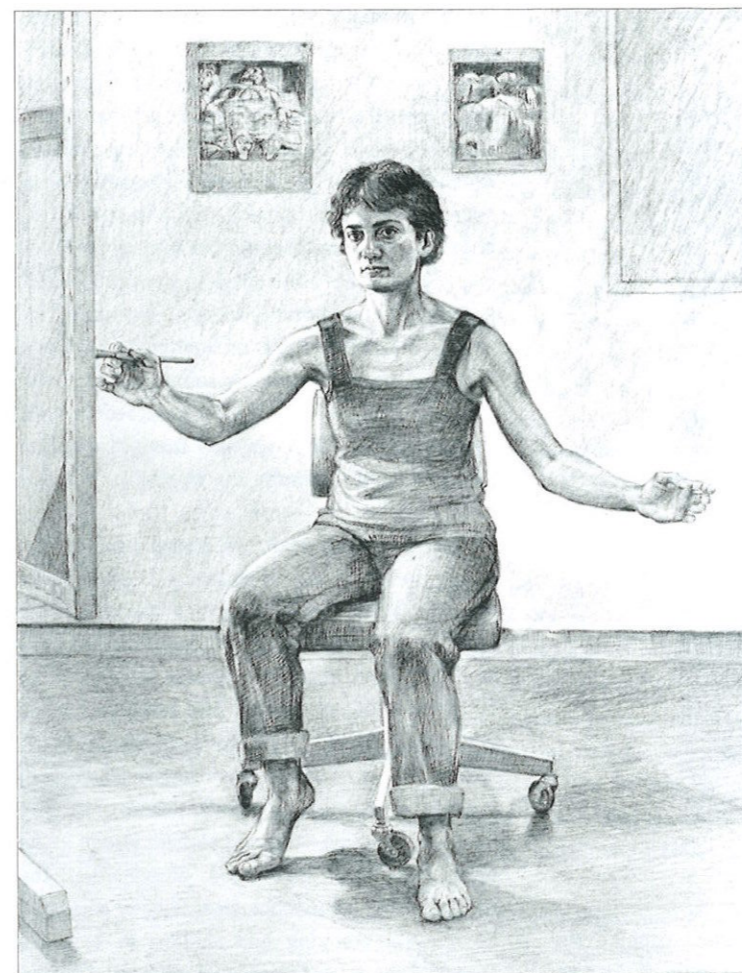
Мистецька творчість Лігії Богнар-Балагутрак пов'язує довголітні сподівання родичів із її власним самопізнанням. Її мистецька освіта базується на класиці західного мистецтва нової ери – від ренесансу через бароко і сецесію – до сьогоднішніх пошуків постмодернізму. Кремезна фігуративність Мікеланджело, драматичні світлотіні Караваджо, мрійливість, молодість прерафаелістів і експериментальна гібридизація матеріалів – перехрещуються у мистецтві Богнар-Балагутрак з колажами, які передають глибини її емоційно-духовного ставлення до землі батьків. Хоча спосіб її мистецького виразу мінливий, різноманітний і не

Everything that Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak stands for is poured into her art. At the heart of it all is her intense connection to Ukraine – the wellspring of her emotional being and self-perception. Her art is at once a delicate and volatile mediation between her American experience of a mythical Ukraine – the product of her childhood imagination – and a physically real, but remote land. Reconciling discontinuities of geography and history, her art negotiates a fine line between the inheritance of a richly-endowed culture and the alienation brought about by a century of inimical socio-historical conditions. As an American artist of Ukrainian descent, Bodnar-Balahutrak's art wrestles primarily with issues of displaced identity. The works represented in this album are a result of her persistent efforts to bridge the divide. Twenty-five years of her work coincide with tumultuous political transformation and social upheaval wrought upon Ukraine. In 1991, the unanticipated (but deeply desired) shift from a totalitarian dictatorship to sovereignty and independence for Ukraine affected the artist with the same psychic response as if she were a natural-born Ukrainian citizen. Seeking to build a bridge to a world lost in translation – one that could only be reconstructed with the aid of self-conscious identity markers – makes Bodnar-Balahutrak's art allegorical, anthropological, and profoundly autobiographical. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bodnar-Balahutrak's art has become fluently post-modernist, addressing in a contemporary artistic language the universal issues of the last one hundred years: genocide, exile, and cataclysm. Apparitions of the human form, pictorially hybridized in "Chornobyl Deposition" (1993) and "Another Crucifixion" (1993) and set within iconic settings, are a redemptive reference to the nuclear disaster of 1986 and the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine. Through a strategy of fragmentation, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak expresses her overwhelming outrage over the cultural devastation that has besotted this unvanquishable nation. The prolonged effects of such events is the stuff of her work. As made clear by titles alone – "Stalin's Victims Return", "Terra Incognita", "Rebirth of a Nation" and "A Despot's Commandments" – Bodnar-Balahutrak's position is unambiguous. The tactile substance of the *Fragments* series, to which these works belong, comprises a very personal (and painful) response to the trauma of devastation wrought upon the Ukrainian nation by artificial famine, collectivization, and the purges of intellectual and cultural life during the twentieth century.

Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's work is about loss, mourning, and remembrance. She takes on the vestiges of

Автопортрет в робітні.  
Папір, олівець. 1985. 28x22.

Studio Self-Portrait.  
Pencil on paper. 1985. 28x22 cm.



однозначний, проте тематика послідовно автобіографічна. Почавши з реалістичних портретів і продовжуючи експериментами з фактурою, в одному вона залишається постійною – у повазі до своєї національно-культурної спадщини.

У реалістичних портретах 70-х і 80-х років Лігія Богнар-Балагутрак часто

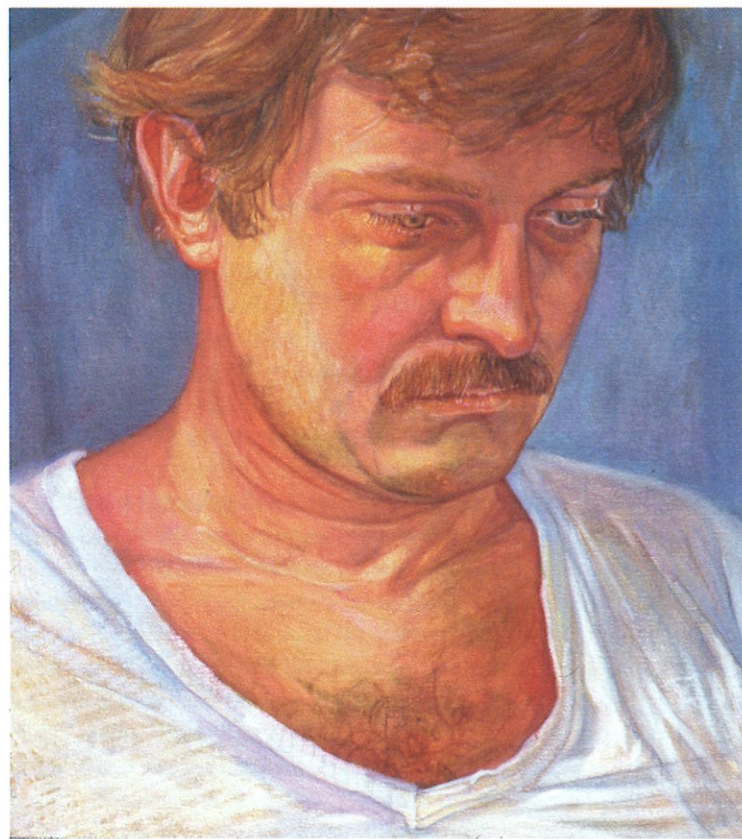
the trauma and the search for lost qualities and treats the subject with compassion, understanding, and an overwhelming sense of hope. A refugee mentality undeniably defines the parameters of her self-knowledge. Sometimes, it erupts wistfully like a fleeting memory; at other times, it takes on strong associational and metaphoric overtones, in the haunting lyrics of an immigrant funeral dirge. The song, "Hear Me, Brother of Mine" – based on a poetic metaphor of cranes flying across an oceanic distance – was written in exile and expresses the longing to be back in the homeland before one's time is up. By using this commemorative motif as a rallying point in the 1994 mixed media work of the same title, she elicits the mournful pathos associated with the loss of home. Similarly, by using pieces of embroidery – the loving handiwork of grandmothers and mothers – she creates a palpable connection with the very people whose aesthetic and cultural values she embraces. As seen in "For Me, A Dream" (1993), the artist places her (death) mask upon haptic relics of her own kin, thus adding her singular physical remnants to the archaeological sediment of her nation's culture.

For most of her life, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's understanding of her ancestral home was relayed through the prism of her parents' and grandparents' experiences as refugees. Forced to leave Ukraine during the Second World War, they survived transatlantic passage and set to the task of reconstructing their traditions in a foreign land. As was common to most experiences of exile transmitted to the first American-born generation, routines of daily life were invested with "old-world" customs and beliefs. Ceremonious reenactment of longstanding national traditions, both secular and religious, made for vivid remembrances of a tightly-knit immigrant community. But as much as such festive domestic rituals would delight any child growing up, they were also bound to create a sense of "otherness" or separateness. Being culturally different in America was exacerbated by the inability to travel freely to the parental homeland, to authenticate one's experience of being Ukrainian away from Ukraine. Critic Viktor Burgin describes this state of in-betweenness as "the melancholy tension of separation from our origins." By not being a true immigrant, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak could not fully express her loyalty to her parentage except vicariously, through her empathic insight into a historic past. Nonetheless, her relationship to Ukraine was never unambivalent: the quotation of Michelangelo's bound slave appropriated for the painting "Witnesses" of 1994-95 serves as an obvious metaphor. Constructed as a diptych, its roughened impasto surfaces recall the beckoning settings of



зображує своїх рогичів ("Подих часу"). Вона вмiло поєднує класичну манеру і осучаснений академічний рисунок. Старенька бабуня (або гiдусь) – у похилому віці – зображені в цих ранніх творах тендітно, душевно, гiдно. Не нагiлені силою, вони майже прозорі, але зв'язок з ними залишається теплим і близьким.

Переїхавши з дому батьків до Техасу (де живе по сьогодні), Лiгiя Боднар-Балагутрак проводить нові пошуки, викликані прагненням пізнавати себе як жінку-грузину. Так



**Штрих до портрета Михайла.**  
Полотно, олія. 1982. 40x45.

**Study of Michael.**  
Oil on canvas. 1982. 40x45 cm.

постають прозаїчні портрети чоловіка Михайла і ряд портретів нових друзів. Майже ностальгiйно Боднар-Балагутрак розробляє тематику пройденого часу, коли гiвчина стає жінкою, і коли пробуджуються в неї нові почування (серія "Екстазія"). У творі "Спокуса" вона цитує автопортрет вагітної художниці німецького експресiонiзму Паули Модерсон-Бекер, консолiдуючись із жінками-художницями, котрі протягом столiть прагнули заманіфестувати свій творчий голос у

Gustave Moreau's Symbolist paintings. Across an abyss of obfuscation, one's heritage might possibly be found, but along with it, unfulfilled dreams and disappointment. The artist makes these visceral through the shards of broken pottery that seem to have fallen off the work. Such oscillations between vacuous spaces and their pseudo-archaeological remnants give Bodnar-Balahutrak's art a provocatively existential tone.

Through the implicit narrative of portraiture, the artist establishes the coda of her philosophical musings. Since it was through the individual members of her family that she came to know and validate herself as a dislocated artist occupying two divergent worlds, the pictorial treatment of the elderly immigrant generation, painted in the 1970s, unfolds with dignity and grace. The simplicity of their surroundings is reflected in the meekness of their demeanor and underscores their humanity. In the subtle tensions of a low-key drama, these works explore the theme of surrender to one's fate, without a relinquishment of hope. The figures are pensive, self-reflective, warmly absorbing the gaze of the artist who records their mundane routines. The artist as grandchild – ever respectful, yet incessantly curious – probes the privacy of their ruminations and relays the cherished details of their increasingly solitary worlds. The tracings of a life fully-lived are etched in their faces and express their spiritual strength, not their corporeal frailty. Despite the Wyeth-like ordinariness that bathes these works, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak probes their underlying metaphysical nature, seeking a way to understand cultural exile and the liminal, residual experiences associated with "leave-taking". In these prosaic portraits, the artist discovers nostalgic stirrings brought about by spiritual discontinuities. She develops a visual language of self-portrayal that plays witness to her affinity for their experience and begins a process of identity construction for herself. Echoes of her own being loom behind her grandmother's visage in the pencil drawing of 1978 titled "Grandmother: The Way She Was". A psychological tension is created by unusual cropping and shallow or confined spaces. Color is used sparingly in these portraits of the elderly. It is drained into a diaphanous play of light and shadow as if to emphasize depleting energies on the verge of disappearance.

What Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak inherited from her kin was not simply the parochial passing of one generation's knowledge to the next. She also witnessed their tireless dedication – especially in the years of the Cold War – to stave off the systematic destruction of Ukrainian identity brought about by the

мистецтві. Фемiнiзм Лiгiї Боднар-Балагутрак спрямований культурологiчно: "Голівки до сонця" вказують на потужну жіночу силу, яка спроможна перемогти різні суперечності. Запозичуючи вiвтарні прийоми захiднохристиянських церков, вона творить композицію жертви своєму покликанню. З одного боку, темний свiт втраченого, невикористаного; а з iншого – ясна iдейність і потенціал. Тут Боднар-Балагутрак наводить образ Лесі Українки, цитуючи бiля неї старогрецьку жіночу фігуру – одним словом, звернення до універсальної переможної сили жінки.

Твори Лiгiї Боднар-Балагутрак пройняті мистецькою класикою, що свiдчить про глибоке знання свiтового мистецтва, яке вона пізнала зблизька в частих поїздках по музеях Європи. Її картини перегукуються з iталійським Леонардо, голландським Рембрангтом і австрiйським Клімтом. Часом вона зображує себе iронiчно, як постать чоловічу, задумуючись над альтернативами у житті ("Якби бути чоловіком!"). З iншого боку, бореться з жіночим iдеалом ("Комплекс Магонни"). Самовизначення мисткині серед розмiттих персонажів окреслює її шлях до самопізнання. Вона дозволяє собі запозичувати навіть форму iконо-графiчно зображеної Божої Матері для пошуків свого власного "Я".

У серії під назвою "Дещо iнші iкони" постає Богоматері стає свiдком сплундрованої політичними силами української духовності. Незважаючи на спроби антирелігiйної iдеологiї винищити віру в Бога, ці iкони не піддаються цiлковитому знищенню; не розвіяні вони прахом, хоча iконні рами спалені, спустошені, немовби витягнуті з попелу, покриті невартiсними копiйками. Цiєю серією Лiгiя Боднар-Балагутрак захищає свою віру в націю, до якої вона належить, і не піддається спокусам мистецької комерції.

Мистецтво Лiгiї Боднар-Балагутрак, зокрема серія "Фрагменти", гiдно вшановує пам'ять мiльйонів жертв, котрі постраждали у часі сталiнських нагiнок, і всiх, хто загинув під час голодомору 30-х рiкiв. Здавалося б, що Чорнобильська трагедія мала бути вже останньою, апокаліптичною трагедією безталанного народу, але, навпаки, як вказано у творі "Ще огне розп'яття", – воскресний день ще буде. Такі катаклiзми вiщували б про загибель народу, але госi не спроможні були зломити його дух.

homogenizing agency of Soviet ideology. The iconographic parameters of Bodnar-Balahutrak's paintings thus include references to history and literary figures, poets and bards. Her collages incorporate the vestiges of folk handicraft and crudely-typed verses (passed through many hands), scribbled drawings, segments of letters along with envelopes that delivered them – the only point of contact with relatives who stayed behind.

The modalities of the refugee mentality are inured in Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's art, notwithstanding her status as a born and bred American. The "memory" of a Ukraine where she never lived (and only visited for the first time in 1991), whose air she never breathed but through the lungs of her family, defines her aesthetic of estrangement. The pathos of human suffering brought about by the upheavals of two world wars finds a direct analogue in liturgical symbolism. Even as she creates a grotesque display of man's inhumanity to man (as seen in the work "Last Rites" of 1992-93 from the *Fragments* series), engendering the same dark cynicism of Francisco de Goya's "Los Caprichos", she addresses the neglect and disregard for the Ukrainian Church and the Eastern Christian tradition under siege in the Communist era (e.g., "That Which Conceals and Reveals" of 1992-93 and "Jacob's Ladder" of 1994-1995). The incorporation of liturgical objects, and other references to ecclesiastical rituals are a tribute to the cherished memory of her grandfather, a Uniate priest. She incarnates his presence by including the personal artifacts of his vocation in her work: the epitrahelion – a Byzantine priestly stole and vestment (phelonion). By manipulating these vestigial objects of a sacred calling she enacts a kind of reverse blasphemy that seeks to expose the rampant desacralization of Ukrainian religious culture and the wholesale destruction of its churches.

In the series *Another Kind of Icon*, the properties of traditional iconology – a frame-within-a-frame format, the use of gold leaf, and the insertion of the key image within the recessed central area of the panel – represent her allegiance to those who perished for their faith. Throughout this series, the sanctified image of the Mother of God is besmirched by inimical forces. The face of the Theotokos is profaned by an ominous dark silhouette of a figure standing only a breath's away from the sacred visage, partially concealing it and obscuring its grace-giving power. In other instances, the icon seems to be undergoing a mysterious conflagration from within, forcing out traces of human features emerging out of cremated ash. These alternative icons are studded with commemorative medals, tokens, and devalued coins.





**В чеканні Великодня.**  
Полотно, олія.  
1979. 90x75.

**Anticipating Easter.**  
Oil on canvas.  
1979. 90x75 cm.

Their torched and cindered frames suggest that they had been relegated for incineration long ago, and yet, though charred and despoiled, they remain indestructible. The unusual sculptural installation piece of 1990 titled "Gates: Sacred and Profane" further reinforces the ecclesiastical symbolism that runs through Bodnar-Balahutrak's works. It takes the form of the Royal Doors of an iconostasis with its gnarly carving of the genealogical Tree of Jesse. Where, traditionally, icon images of Christ's ancestors would rise up the branches of the tree, the artist substitutes the forebears of Jesus with clay relief plates of ancient warrior figures and nubile classical forms. The theological content of the Royal Doors is thus replaced by six medallions of a secular theme, and crowned by a tier of putti-like cherubs. Just as German Expressionist artists expressed the loss of spirituality in modern industrial Europe by seeking inspiration in their medieval traditions, painters such as Max Beckmann resorted to the conventions of multiple-paneled altarpieces to show the constitutive elements of war and human suffering. Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's Expressionist painting titled "Of Whom Are They? Of Whom Am I?" (1994-95) similarly appropriates the bottom panel of an altarpiece – the predella – to disclose layers of meaning imbedded in the sleep of generations put to rest long ago. Recalling Gauguin's own search for primal roots, her works reprise the nagging questions of his 1897 painting "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?"

Western masters as well as Ukrainian academic painters – from Caravaggio to Shevchenko – have inspired the poses and gestures of Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's personae. A series of color pencil drawings from the later 1980s (e.g., "Fighting Demons" of 1988-89) resonates in the aesthetics of classical disegno – the basics of good drawing and the foundation of sound academic art. The enduring quality of her work is affirmed on the strength of this training and practice, inspired by great masters scrupulously studied during her travels through Europe. The Baroque and Italian Renaissance inform much of Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's art – from the masculinizing of the female figure in the manner of Michelangelo to the implied worm's eye view perspectives represented in the altarpieces of Piero della Francesca. In "Heads Toward the Light" (1990-93), she quotes the central panel of Piero's famous 1454 polyptych in Sansepolcro, Italy, to show that The Madonna della Misericordia extends her protective cloak not only over the Italians of the Renaissance, but also over the Ukrainians in the post-Soviet era.

A signature feature of Bodnar-Balahutrak's paintings is her expert handling of chiaroscuro. Through



**Нове відродження нації.**  
Триптих.  
Із серії "Фрагменти".  
Папір, олія, колаж.  
1991. 32,5x55.

**Rebirth of a Nation.**  
Triptych. "Fragments" Series.  
oil, collage, paper.  
1991. 32,5x55 cm.

Для Лідії Богнар-Балагутрак, світогляду якої формувалася в діаспорі, ці погії стали поштовхом до непереможного бажання побувати ближче біля своїх пращурів. У серії "Вігтиски" – маски її обличчя і рук – одним словом, усе мислення і праця – вона уособлює у вишиваній подушці і традиційному рушнику – речах, виконаних руками рідної бабуні. В інших творах вона завішує епітрахиль і фелон сідуся, вшановуючи його посвяту і відданість переслідуваній українській церкві.

Літургійні прийоми спрацьовують скрізь у роботах Лідії Богнар-Балагутрак: вівтарні триптихи, диптихи, ікони, навіть царські ворота стають для неї символами людської духовності – боротьби між святощами і профанацією.

Автобіографічний момент у творчості мисткині конструюється на монтажі різноманітного матеріалу – від сушених галузок червоної калини і шматків вишиваних полотен до побутових жетонів, дрібних монет і меморіальних значків.

Друковані на звичайній машинці рядки віршів, частинки поштівок-листів і конверт, надіслані в Америку від рідні в Україні, – усе це встановлює "археологію" життя українців, розкиданих по континентах. Про це йдеться в мистецтві Лідії Богнар-Балагутрак: як примирювати ці два світи. З одного боку, вона болісно переживає нездійснені мрії переселенців з рідної землі і співчуває долі цього творчого покоління, яке боролася

a subtle play of lights and shadows, as seen in the series *Lifestory Vignette*, she models her forms using a limited low-key palette of earthen tones. The shocking introduction of fields of aquamarine and turquoise, typical of some of her work of the 1980s, disturbs the otherwise calm setting. It shapes a dialogue of polarities reflective of the contextual dichotomies inherent in her work: America and Ukraine, sacred and profane, old and young, male and female. The oppositions are revealed in the diptych "My Ego and Alter Ego" (1979) – a straightforward hyper-realist portrait of herself alongside a separately painted canvas of her husband, Michael. There is absolute parity in this dual portrait, where the equal scale and same degree of intensity would never hint at the presence of a "weaker sex". The artist's husband, Michael Balahutrak has frequently served as a model for her. The artist adopts his masculinity for her own transgendered self-portraits, in which she addresses the conflict of selves. The staid Cezanniste-styled self-portrait titled "Second Sight" (1992-93) demonstrates Bodnar-Balahutrak's predilection to present herself through such alternative identities. These are playful impersonations, typical of her desire to manifest her being through the guise of other figures. She wryly and matter-of-factly embodies qualities of maleness, while ironically revealing her own secret female wishes: "Oh, To Be a Man" (1984).

Aside from engendering maleness, the artist's female presence is also broadly personified. Pubescent sitters who disclose the muted subtleties of coming of age and loss of innocence in her *Ecstasy* series, or models of irreproachable virtue such as the Byzantine Theotokos, mark the range of her adopted alter-egos. In all cases, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak shuns the display of beauty in order to probe the effects of suppressed feelings. Whether entranced in the wispy pleasure of their femaleness (e.g., "A Rite of Passage" of 1986) or ensconced in dark shallow settings (e.g., "Despairing" of 1988), these female subjects dare the viewer to enter into their ciphered world. Including herself in this gallery of portraits, she becomes part of a sisterhood of keepers of the cultural flame – ready to stand guard over a privileged hermeneutic knowledge. The faraway stares and personal solitude – a mixture of isolation and intimacy – are imbued with a mystery highlighted by warm theatrical lighting emerging from somewhere below and "off-stage". Like an actress taking on roles (or putting on masks), as in "Whose Mask? Whose Noble Face?" (1995-96), Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak consistently uses the self-portrait to explore her indentity as a woman, reciprocated by the strength of her female subjects. They are often treated as symbolic familial, mythological, Biblical, or historic ideals – as the Wife, the Innocent, the Madonna.

**Чернобильська реліквія. Фрагмент.**  
Дерево, позолота, мішана техніка.  
1993-1994. 53x33x5.

**Chornobyl Relics. Detail.**  
Gold leaf, wood, mixed media.  
1993-1994. 53x33x5 cm.







за свободу народу, поклавши всі зусилля на збереження України; але з іншого боку – це сторінки історії. Народившись і зростаючи в Америці, – і будучи сучасною і єдиною, – доводиться писати свою історію. Її мистецтво свідчить про великі зміни останнього десятиліття, коли нові надії заглушують емігрантську тугу. Однак слова Богдана Лепкого, якими в зарубіжжі символічно проводили на вічний спокій борців за волю і державність України, залишаються загадками про все, що оточувало мисткиню від самого дитинства. Не дивно, що вона сміливо запозичує і перетворює у своєму творі "Чуєш, браме мій", початковий рядок жалібної стрілецької пісні, одночасно прославляючи пам'ять про дідуся (по матері) Гурка, хороброго українського січового стрільця:

Чуєш, браме мій,  
Товаришу мій,  
Відлітають сірим шнурком  
Журавлі у вирій.  
Кличуть – кру-кру-кру,  
В чужині умру,  
Поки море перелечу,  
Крилонька зітру,  
Крилонька зітру...

Курликання галеколетючого журавля лунає підтекстом у творчості Лідії Богднар-Балахутрак і береже її як творця сучасного мистецтва на переломі двох світів, поколінь і століть від ніяковості і остаточного відчуження.

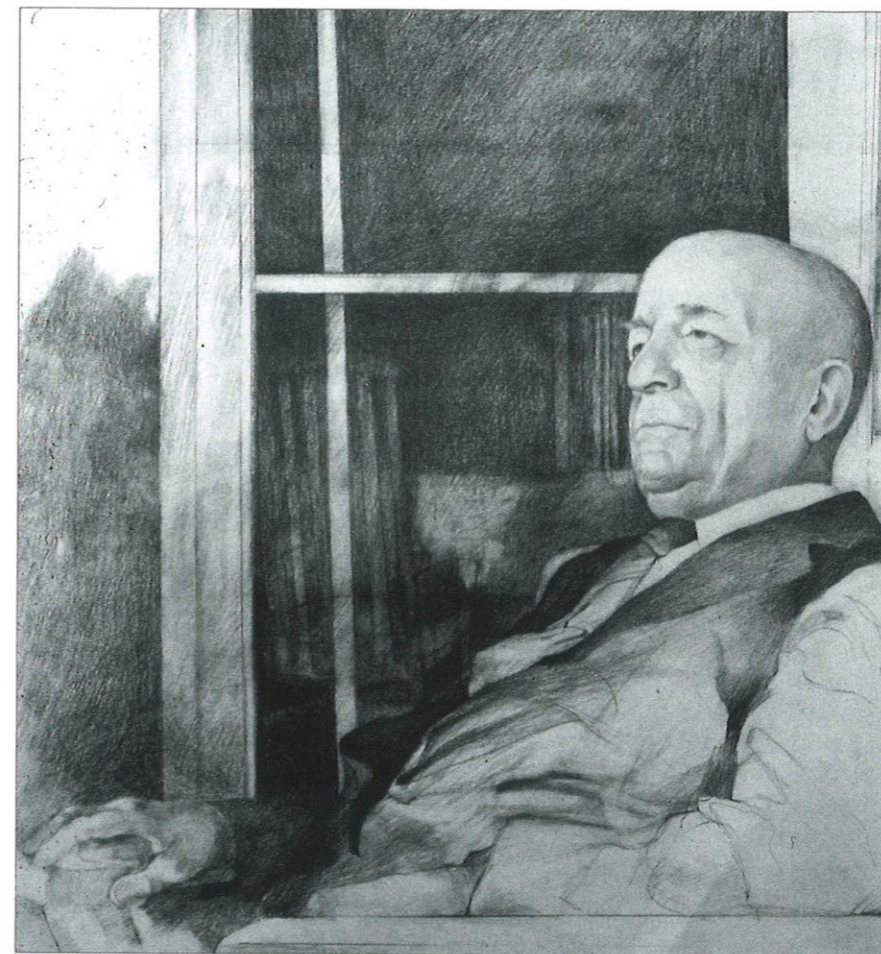
**Птах у руках.**  
Фрагмент.  
Картон, олія.  
1985. 35x20.

**A Bird in the Hand.**  
Detail.  
Oil on board.  
1985. 35x20 cm.

Paintings such as "Journeying Into Wonderland" (1988) bring to mind the sensuality of the Pre-Raphaelites, while "Heads Toward the Light" (1990-93), resonates in the spirit of Gustave Klimt's cult of the female. The subject of Judith beheading Holofernes, so forcefully rendered by the female painter Artemisia Gentileschi, dramatically depicts female determination. Here the artist presents herself in a militant and uncompromising stance; her monumental warrior-like posture fends away those who would disturb the detritus of culture. Amidst amulets and totems, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak preserves the memory of Ukraine's most famous female poet, Lesya Ukrainka, whose life took on mythical proportions as she battled tuberculosis while writing great poetry. The poet is shown in the predella below, next to the totemic silhouette of a Cycladic figure. The work has the breadth of an epic, punctuated by an archetypal reference to a ritualistic festival of flowers.

In the stark painting, "My Story" (1994-95), Klimtian symbolist classicism hearkens back to the Lydian peoples of Graeco-Roman times, invoking the artist's namesake. A warlike people, the Lydians were known for stamping small ingots with pale gold, traces of which are introduced into this otherwise extremely somber work. The play on the name "Lydia" inscribed to the right, the medallion stamped with portraits of her lineage that forms a halo around her head, and the pseudo-gold background display the artist's marriage of traditional religious iconography to the classical Western secular tradition. Her reliance on classical traditions of European art history and Western civilization is evident in "The Seduction" (1993), lifted directly from German painter Paula Modersohn-Becker's gentle treatment of woman's (pro)creative powers.

Over time, what becomes clear about Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's art is that the equilibrium and autonomy once secured and nurtured by her family in the diaspora's comfort zone are set against the discordant realities of present-day Ukraine, and invite a note of disenfranchisement. The fall of communism and the renewed hopes for the future have created radical shifts in the artist's approach. Years of disaffection have come to be symbolized by materials that are torn or broken apart, burned or distressed in some way. Her use of cracked and brittle gold and dried vegetation underscores the remnants of life, the last traces of vitality. Among classical drawings and symbolist paintings one finds bold works of varied mixed media where ruble coins, burnt wood, and tattered cloth become the material language of a disparaged culture. What Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak is able to examine through skillful illusionism (dress lace, the tile



**Дідо Таці.**  
Папір, олівець. 1978. 45x45

**Grandfather.**  
Graphite pencil, paper. 1978. 45x45 cm.



**Непізнана земля.**  
Із серії "Фрагменти".  
Папір, олія, колаж.  
1994. 30x23.

**Terra Incognita.**  
"Fragments" Series.  
Oil, collage, paper.  
1994. 30x23 cm.

patterning of a kitchen floor, the ragged texture of a rug or upholstery fabric) becomes equally valid through its tactile substitutes: fragmentary minutiae that she presents meticulously in paint, become actual compositional elements in her art. The physical material of her work brings the devastation and uncertainty of Ukraine's fate to the surface.

When Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak made her first trip to Ukraine on a fellowship from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), she was able, in part, to reconcile her childhood antinomies. Her vision began to encompass a social, rather than a privately-held, subjective view. It became not a sociological critique, but a complex artistic response to the ubiquitous voices permeating post-Soviet Ukraine. Indeed, the year of Ukraine's declaration of independence coincided with a creative liberation for the artist that brought radical changes in her medium and technique. The jubilation of Ukraine's independence came to be expressed by "Rebirth of a Nation" (1991) in the form of a proclamation: the confetti-strewn fanfare of mass celebrations, validated and legitimized by a trident embossed like a wax stamp on the surface of the work. Returning twice more to Ukraine – once to participate in a two-month International Artists' Symposium and, later, as a visiting artist at the Art Academy in Kyiv – she was able to shape her recurrent leitmotif of death into a symbol of renewal, even as her personal witnessing unveiled undercurrents of despair. The seemingly disjunctive unrelatedness of the objects in her mixed media works persist in alluding to her conflicts about belonging and non-belonging. The photocopy and mixed media series *Imprints*, which delivers strong emotions through reified word-plays and sentient gestures, is semantically rich in this regard.

Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's art remains a tribute to the preponderance of rich values carried long ago from the Ukrainian homeland. The bittersweet remembrances of her youth and the anguish of the realities of adulthood make for the contemplative nature of her art. Her concerns are not about the absolutes of beauty, idyllic existence, or ideal perfection. Despite the departing of individual family members, or the mass loss of Ukrainians on their own land, she can assert for herself the reality, not the myth, of her nation. The journey first undertaken by her parents and grandparents continues in her life and refuses to come full circle. Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's art is an extension of that journey, in perpetual motion, vividly recounting memories and actively reviving hopes and expectations. "The Madonna Complex" painted in 1982 – a self-portrait with eyes that have cried themselves out – reveals the gravity of irretrievable, uncontrollable losses that confound her and propel her art.