

LYDIA BODNAR-BALAHUTRAK

Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak was born in Cleveland, Ohio, completed her undergraduate art studies at Kent State University, studied at the Corcoran School of Art and, in 1977, received her Master of Fine Arts degree in painting from George Washington University, Washington, D.C. That year she moved to Houston, Texas where she continues to live and work.

Since 1991, the artist has participated in a number of curated, catalogued, and touring national and international exhibitions and been awarded artist residencies in France, Ukraine, and U.S. venues. An IREX grant enabled her to travel to Ukraine for the first time in 1991. It was a turning point in her creative work and world view. A concern with the human condition – always at the heart of her art – took new form and urgency. Subsequent trips to Ukraine included a 1996 visit to the Chernobyl Zone, which left a lasting impression of nature's power of reclamation and healing. Her current mixed media paintings and drawings continue to explore recurring nature motifs combining collage, text, and figuration.

The artist's work can be found in museum and private collections in the U.S.A., Canada, and Europe. A monograph focusing on her art from 1979-2001 was published in 2005. In 2012 the Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts presented her solo show *Thresholds*, featuring a selection from 20 years of work. She has taught at the University of Houston at Clear Lake and is currently on the Studio Faculty of the Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.





BEAR (T)HUGS, 2015

Felted bear, 5 painted wooden nesting dolls; 10 x 14 x 6 in

The titles of my art give clues to the work. I probe individual identity and cultural ties, piece together fragments of text and figuration, and perpetuate a discourse about one's place in the world.

My work begins with collecting newspaper and magazine articles, treasured mementos, and bits of artifacts that address specific themes I wish to explore in more depth. Selecting items gathered from various documentary sources, I arrange them in a sort of self-perpetuating dialogue, then collage them onto canvas, wood, or paper. Imagery evolves by adding and subtracting elements of found text - by painting, drawing, veiling, and scraping with oil, charcoal, chalks and wax. At the same time, I examine the nature of language, how information is disseminated, what is revealed and what is concealed. I see how narratives can be created, implied, hidden, disguised. My ongoing process of layering and abrading words, images, and various ephemera reflects my deep interest in how experiences arise, submerge, resurface, and unravel over time.

If You Had Only Known spells out Ivan Franko's poem with embedded raised and recessed letters, and surrounds them with scraps of embroidered fabric and layers of metal leaf, acrylic, oil and wax. The textured work is meant to express the visceral power of language, to underscore the "might and weight" of every word.

Bear (T)hugs is a three-dimensional play on words, in which a felted bear (Russia) contains the 'nesting dolls' of Putin, Lenin, Rasputin, and - at the core - vermin. It also begs the question: What indeed is in a name?

In the Nests series, I incorporate a fable-like language in which a menagerie of animals act as stand-ins for human dramas. A common housefly shirks off victimhood and snares a mighty predator (represented by a Soviet coin). The snake readies to attack from his nest, built to deceive and ensnare. These are my visual puns and political parables, inviting discourse about the very nature of humanity.

Like many others, I have grown up in two cultures -- the hereditary culture passed on and nurtured by my displaced post-World War II immigrant family, and the culture of the country in which I was born and raised, where I continue to live and work.

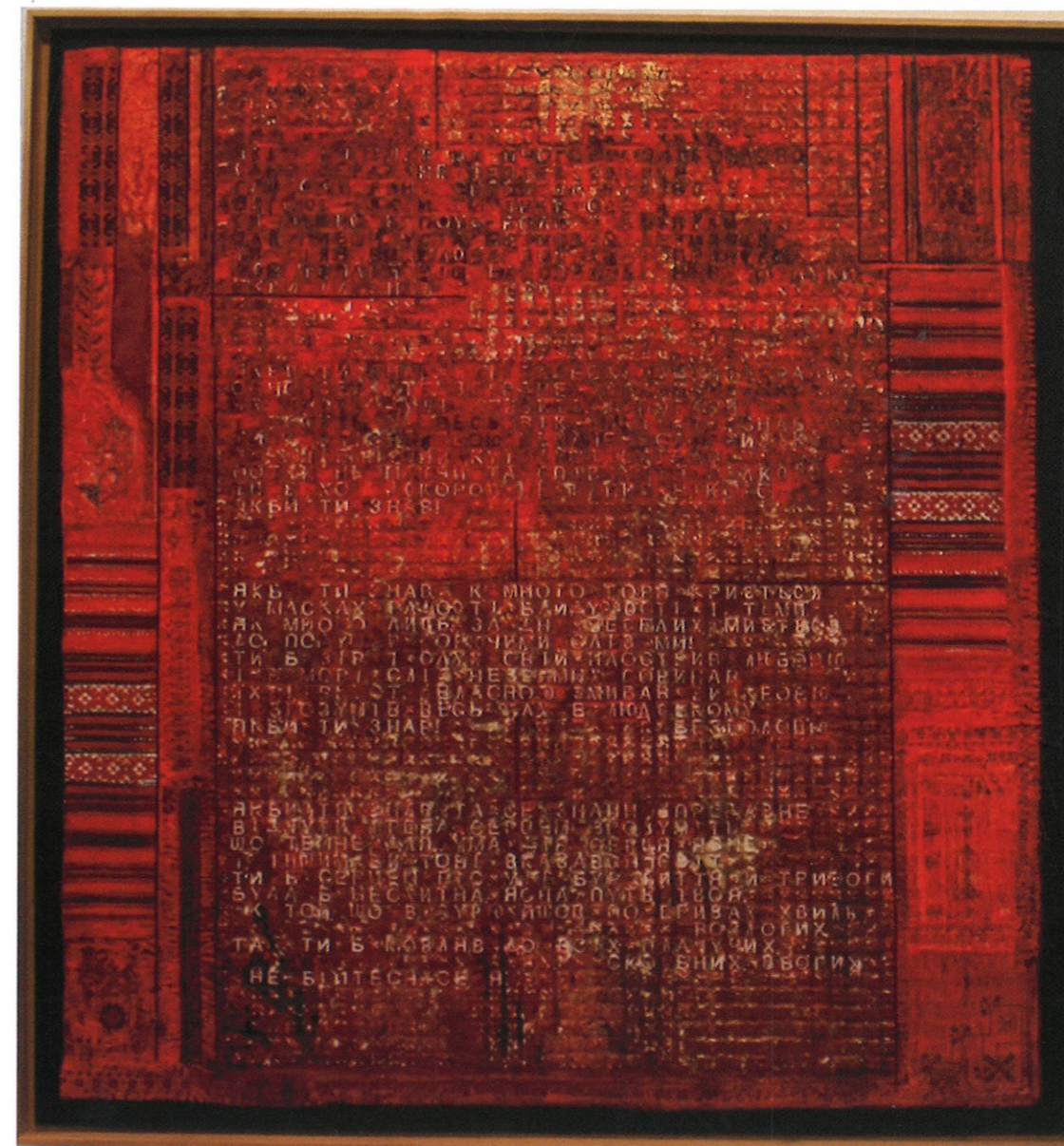


BITES FROM HOME, 2014
Egg tempera, ink, charcoal, stamped envelope, paper; 9 x 9 in

YOU ARE WHAT YOU'RE FED, 2014
Ink, ruble coin, stamp, paper; 9 x 9 in



FICKLE FELINE, 2014
Ink, ruble note, paper; 9 x 9 in



IF YOU HAD ONLY KNOWN, 2014
Embroidery, mixed media, wood; 67.5 x 62.5 in



THE SNAKE, 2014
Collage, ink, charcoal, paper; 9 x 9 in

FLY EYE TO EYE, 2014
Collage, ink, chalk, Soviet coin, paper;
9 x 9 in



WORDS, WORDS, WORDS, 2014
Egg tempera, collage, paper; 9 x 9 in



ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD, 2014
Ink, ruble note, paper; 9 x 9 in



O, BOHDANEI, 2014
Charcoal, ink, Ukrainian hryvnia, paper;
9 x 9 in

BAD EGG, 2014
Ink, collage, ruble note, paper; 9 x 9 in

