

## Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak

Hunter Gather Project, Houston, Texas

Recommendation by Donna Tennant



Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak, "Spider's Catch," 2014, inks, resins, netting, Soviet coin and Ukrainian hryvnia coin on paper, 9 x 9"

*Continuing through March 14, 2015*

Ever since Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's made her first trip — a pilgrimage, really — to her ancestral home of Ukraine many years ago, she has been preoccupied with the history and politics of her

homeland. Her artwork reflects that interest. The so-called "stealth" invasion of the Crimean portion of Ukraine by Russian troops beginning about a year ago has inspired the current body of work. These 26 pieces, which range from less than one foot square to more than five feet tall, all involve some element of collage, and the multiple layers reflect not only the complicated history of Ukraine, but the seemingly endless suppression of the people who live there. Local coins, ruble notes, newspapers, embroideries, maps, stamps, and even leaves and dirt find their way into her work, which is augmented with acrylic, oil, wax, charcoal and ink.

In "Will the Grass Grow Over It?" Bodnar-Balahutrak uses oil, wax and resin on a ground of text and images about Stalin's 1932-33 Holodomor in Ukraine, a man-made famine during which as many as seven million people died. The grass in the painting refers to journalist Vasily Grossman's comments on the situation, which included the words in the title, as well as "Can it really be that no one will ever answer for everything that has happened?"

There is an intriguing series on nests — 17 small works that address both their positive and negative aspects. A nest can be a nurturing place or it can harbor evil, as in "Spider's Catch," in which a large spider lures its prey into its lair. Titles like "You are What You're Fed," "All That Glitters is not Gold," and "Wake Up!" serve as clues to the socio-political message conveyed by Bodnar-Balahutrak's depictions of birds, snakes, mosquitos, and other creatures involved in very human dramas. The artist refers to these collages as "political parables inviting discourse about the very nature of humanity."

For years now, Bodnar-Balahutrak's work has served to inform and enlighten, acknowledge and commemorate, and perhaps most importantly, create a dialogue regarding basic human rights being violated not only in Ukraine, but across the planet. She uses the situation in her homeland as a microcosm for what is happening worldwide, continuing to use her art to investigate the extremes of human nature — not only power and greed, but perseverance and courage as well.