

## THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA: WOMEN ARTISTS, 1908-2015

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Curating *The Ukrainian Diaspora: Women Artists, 1908-2015* presented a number of exciting opportunities and challenges. First and foremost, it is the first major exhibition of its kind. Women artists, the diaspora, and Ukrainian identity were combined as the organizing principle of the exhibition, thereby reframing related exhibitions of Ukrainian artists within Ukrainian diaspora communities. Exhibitions sponsored by Ukrainian women's groups, and by church and youth organizations, have appeared regularly over the decades; even more frequent are exhibitions developed by professional, culturally specific Ukrainian museums across the United States, such as The Ukrainian Museum in New York, the Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, Connecticut, and the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago. Often centered on a theme, historical event, artist, or medium, these exhibitions have featured artists born in Ukraine or of Ukrainian descent. The notion of how one's Ukrainian identity is articulated in the artwork itself is rarely addressed, however. It is a shared group experience, an implicitly understood dialogue between the artist of the diaspora and the assumed diasporan visitor, in which the artwork speaks for itself.

The current exhibition was defined, at least in part, by the commemoration of the 90th anniversary of The Ukrainian Museum's founding entity – the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA). A longstanding supporter of philanthropic, cultural, and community endeavors, the UNWLA has addressed the needs and interests of Ukrainian groups and individuals underserved by mainstream resources. These include not only orphanages, schools, and churches, but also artists, who work with the spiritual, emotional, and expressive fabric of culture and who are vital to the exchange of ideas and the perpetuation and reformulation of a culture's identity. As Ukraine has existed historically under threat of cultural erasure through colonization, russification, and sovietization, the desire to support its forms of cultural expression has been encouraged and celebrated with energized sincerity. That spirit of support is extended to the recognition of women artists and their important work in the sphere of cultural identity and expression.

In contrast to the smaller circle of diasporan Ukrainian culture, and historically in mainstream culture, the work and professional credibility of women artists were relegated to secondary status by a male-dominated art industry, as evidenced by the history of women artists.<sup>1</sup> Although much has improved for women since the 1970s with the impact of the women's and civil rights movements in the United States, the tendency for women to be excluded from mainstream information sources such as Wikipedia, reported as recently as March 7, 2015, in *Art News*,<sup>2</sup> demonstrates that additional effort is needed. As Maura Reilly, Chief Curator at the National Academy Museum, points out, "there are still major systemic problems that need to be addressed,"<sup>3</sup> particularly in women's representation among "the majority of mainstream (non-specialized) museums."<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the artists in this exhibition are above the age of 50 and received their training at a time when "women's" art, in a traditional sense, had often been understood as decorative, non-controversial, and associated with domestic endeavors and environments – and therefore minor in the larger scheme of art production. Craft-based arts, such as textile, needlework, quilting, and decorative painting, are some examples of this traditionally "female" realm, as demonstrated in *Womanhouse*, a project created in 1972 by feminists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro with their art students at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles. The project examined women's traditional roles and questioned their implications for creating art and visual culture; its ultimate goal was to dispel their rigidity.<sup>5</sup> The Ukrainian diaspora also tended to reinforce these roles in its aim to preserve cultural tradition. Embroidery, lace cutwork, and weaving, for example, were often taught by women to their daughters and granddaughters, from generation to generation. The crafts were a necessary skill for the production and maintenance of folk costumes and *rushnyky* (ritual cloths), which were used in various rituals throughout the year. Unlike the art mainstream, however, the Ukrainian diaspora highly esteemed the traditional work of its women artists, for it maintained and perpetuated culture.

The diaspora manages its affinities and attachments to, and its differences with, its culture of origin in a reflexive mode, responding and regrouping in relation to its homeland. By definition, it tends to be more conservative. Its members identify with their original cultural group, lay claim to it, and arguably own it, but how that connection manifests itself is the telling of the diaspora experience. It appears in more ways than one would expect: as a memory, a mode of expression, a belief system; as homesickness, romanticizing, loss, anger – to name just some of the many elements factored into this process of connecting with and reacting to a homeland "over there." It may also change over time, as in the transformation of women artists' association with traditional, domestically oriented arts into the non-domestic professional art industry, mentioned above, or of diaspora Ukrainians' celebration at the sight of their homeland's long-awaited and hoped-for independence in 1991 into tears and frustration during the protests and massacre at Kyiv's Maidan Square during the winter of 2013-2014, and now into the aftermath, waiting again for a resolution to the war in Donbas.

The current exhibition of 44 artists carries a self-consciousness about belonging to the Ukrainian diaspora, and aims to make explicit a number of facets that experience entails. It does not advocate for one direction or another, nor is it inclusive of every artist of the diaspora. Rather, it offers avenues for exploring the pathways artists have chosen to articulate, transform, hybridize, or seemingly disengage from this sensibility. Some works directly assert a connection to Ukrainian themes, representational forms, and historical events – for example, Yaroslava Surmach-Mills' reverse glass paintings of Ukrainian folk life and ritual traditions, Slava Gerulak's ceramic figures and renderings of figures dressed in Ukrainian folk attire, and Christina Kudryk's *The Promised Land* (2011) from the Heritage series and *Maidan* (2014), addressing, respectively, one's past immigration experience and world shock at the events that transpired on the Maidan. Other artworks explore subjects that can be both identified

as Ukrainian and associated with other cultures and agendas. Their meaning offers great interpretive possibilities. For example, a number of visual elements in non-representational works, such as color and design, suggest more evocative associations to specific Ukrainian artistic practices – as in traditional embroidery patterns and styles. Here, distinct color palettes, designs, and stitches are identified with specific geographic regions of Ukraine, situating the embroidered pattern in a particular location. Those familiar with Ukrainian embroidery and its history would likely recognize a link between the hunter green, black, orange, and red color palette commonly used in regions of Western Ukraine and a similar color range in such abstract textile works as Lialia Kuchma's *Extract* (2010), although clear references between the Ukrainian association and its final manifestation are not explicitly put forth within the artwork itself. Nor would most viewers be aware that *Extract* previously existed in the shape of an oblong *rushnyk* (ritual cloth) and was later changed by the artist to meet new aesthetic interests. Similarly, in some of Patricia Zalisko's paintings, such as *Punta Gorda Dusk* (2015), a viewer might make connections between the loosely defined geometric forms and highly saturated colors painted within them, on the one hand, and the colors and designs incorporated in *pysanky* (Ukrainian Easter eggs), to which the artist credits her interest in color. And Sonia Delaunay's memories of the beautiful colors of nature in her childhood home in Ukraine,<sup>6</sup> can be understood as a personal reference contributing to the development of her color theories and fashion design practice. There are countless ways such associations are visually realized by artists – too numerous to be mentioned fully here.

These relationships to things Ukrainian are personal for each artist; Natalka Husar struggles to reconcile her dual cultural identity with a razed Ukrainian homeland in her image of a "should be" innocent girl in *Killing Me Softly* (2004). Sometimes it is documented and clearly visualized in the artwork, as seen in the work of Christina Kudryk, or even that of Lialia Kuchma.<sup>7</sup> In all, a subconscious and inadvertent sense of "Ukrainianness" or Ukrainian identity fluctuates throughout the exhibited works.

This particular exhibition is weighted towards the Ukrainian diaspora in North America, where the majority of its women artists live and work. Emphasis is also placed on artists associated with the third wave of immigration – the post-World War II wave, when the loss of childhood home and country had to be negotiated anew, in a host land where cultural identity, community, and gender roles were redefined and transformed. This group includes artists born in Ukraine before the war, as well as those born abroad into the 1960s. Among the artists associated with the third immigration wave are Roxolana Luczakowsky Armstrong, Liliana Berezowsky, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak, Christina (Holowchak) Debarry, Inka Essenhigh, Anya Farion, Slava Gerulak, Adrianna Tytla Henkels, Motria Jackewych Holowinsky, Natalka Husar, Nina Klymovska, Alexandra Diachenko Kochman, Alexandra Kowerko, Kateryna Krychevska-Rosandich, Jaroslava Lialia Kuchma, Christina (Nawrocky) Kudryk, Daria Hulak Kulchytsky, Sophia Lada, Marta Huley Legeckis, Liudmyla Morozova, Chrystya Olenska, Arcadia Olenska-Petryshyn, Irma Osadsa, Aka Pereyma, Christina Pereyma, Vaka Pereyma, Lidia Piaseckyj, Natalia Pohrebinska, Romana Rainey, Christina Saj, Ilona Sochynsky, Halyna Tytla, Marta Hirniak Voyevodka, and Iryna Homotiuk Zielyk.

In lesser numbers in the exhibition are artists pre-dating the third immigration wave whose work had matured or was already emerging at the time of World War II. They include Sonia Delaunay, Maria Dolnytska, Halyna Mazepa, Yaroslava Surmach-Mills, and Sophia Zarytska. Sonia Delaunay had already emerged in 1908; the others emerged after World War I and into the 1920s. Artists from the fourth immigration wave, who moved abroad after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 and Ukraine's declaration of independence the same year, are also featured in the exhibition: Olya Mishchenko, Yulia Pinkusevich, Tamara Skrypka, and VALYA. Added to all these groupings is Patricia Zalisko, a grandchild and direct descendant of the first wave of Ukrainian immigrant New Yorkers.

The third immigration wave developed as a consequence of World War II, when over 200,000 Ukrainians were displaced. Their entrance into the diaspora coincided with the Soviet Union's plan to annihilate millions of Ukrainians during the war – a resumption of the goals of the Holodomor genocide famine, which began in 1929 with the mass arrests of Ukrainian intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> Government workers, non-Communists, cultural producers, and members of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church were imprisoned on false charges and accused of engaging in nationalist activities.<sup>9</sup> The subsequent artificial famine concocted by Stalin, which at its peak in 1933 was killing 25,000 people per day, so that by the end of the 1930s several million Ukrainians had died, effectively ensured that any impetus towards Ukrainian nationalism, Stalin's greatest fear, would be quashed.<sup>10</sup> This precursor to World War II, the war itself, and the inability to return to Ukraine fueled the diaspora's adherence to maintaining cultural and religious traditions and values, and perpetuating them through close community ties and involvement beyond Ukraine's geographical borders. If their culture and way of life was erased in their former home, it could be re-created and thus preserved, within limits, abroad.

For a majority of the artists in the third immigration wave, membership in the diaspora was a natural part of their upbringing. Ukrainian was often spoken at home, and rituals and traditions were celebrated and cherished, all while relatives in Ukraine were forced to hide or modify their cultural practices (often associated with religious beliefs) under threat of Soviet persecution. Churches, businesses, cultural institutions, and schools in numerous cities across North America formed Ukrainian community hubs – vehicles for maintaining cultural connectedness and reinforcement. Some artists were raised within these hubs; others lived outside them but traveled there regularly to conduct business, attend church or school, see an exhibition, or enjoy a concert. They also visited friends, fellow artists, writers, and musicians; exchanged ideas; and met new people, often across generational lines. Parents brought their children to these activities, involved them in discussions, and, when the children were older and able to do so, frequently sought their contributions to the community, providing cultural continuity. The community was and continues to be an important anchor for numerous Ukrainians of the diaspora, a rich tapestry of activities, sensibilities, and stability, set apart from mainstream culture. It has provided a number of artists with subject matter for interpretation – demonstrated here, for example, in Romana Rainey's watercolors of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Hunter, New York. Situated in Catskill Park, the church was built in 1962 in the traditional Hutsul

style typical of the Carpathian Mountains. In one image, the church is the focal point for a crowd of people standing before it, rendered in green, brown, and black shades – a play perhaps on the brown wood of the actual church, and the pasture and forest surrounding it. The church itself stands amidst a larger architectural complex constructed between the 1960s and 1980s, comprised of a belfry, parsonage, *grazhda* (parish hall), and gate, built and financed by Ukrainian immigrants “who realized the need for a tangible expression of their heritage and were constantly vigilant in the preservation and expression of their culture.”<sup>11</sup> Rainey unites figures with their church environment by using a uniform color palette throughout the composition, suggesting the importance that religion and the church have had for the community. Indeed, several artists in the exhibition have pursued icon painting and explored additional religious themes in their work. Halyna Tytla, Lidia Piaseckyj, Daria Hulak Kulchytsky, and Roxolana Luczakowsky Armstrong are all avid icon painters in a predominantly traditional Byzantine style; their work has been installed in numerous churches and private homes, in large and small panels and stained glass windows. Luczakowsky Armstrong also produces many paintings of religious figures, holy days, and other religious subjects, imbuing her figures with humbly expressive gazes and gestures. Christina Saj also works in this area, fusing ancient and contemporary elements, and has an expansive range of subjects, such as the creation, scenes from the life of Mary, and religious feast days. Saj’s *Tree of Life* (2015) incorporates the bright color palettes and decorative, collage-like techniques emblematic of her style to evoke a broadened and uplifting sense of spirituality and inspiration. In her *Martyr* (1995), Saj’s fracturing of the human form into many small fragments alludes to the subject’s physical bodily demise, leaving the viewer to imagine, perhaps, the breakage of bones.

Figurative art has had a strong footing among Ukrainians and those of the diaspora. The ability to comprehend natural forms, and to master the skills and techniques to render them proficiently, provides the artist with the tools required to interpret life. These values are expressed through various media and techniques, such as illustration, enamel, and printmaking, as well as the classical fine arts. The genres of the traditional art academy – particularly landscape, still life, and portraiture – fulfill these interests, as they comprise aspects of daily existence that surround us: nature, its bounty, people, and sometimes the city. How artists interpret these scenes varies, of course, and expressively articulating such scenes is particularly esteemed, for it characterizes life in an emotional or spiritual manner, beyond simple anecdote, and captures life’s flavor. Daily life informs the work of Kateryna Krychevska-Rosandich, Liudmyla Morozova, Iryna Homotiuk Zielyk, Christina Debarry, Marta Huley Legeckis, Romana Rainey, Tamara Skrypka, and Adrianna Tytla Henkels. Anya Farion’s figurative sculpture, carved in the classical style, may also be situated in this sphere.

Kateryna Krychevska-Rosandich paints primarily landscapes and seascapes. Her view of Venice meticulously renders the nuances of sunlight’s effects on building walls, water, and sky, without overpowering the evocative use of color to convey the calm, rather idyllic, climate of the Mediterranean. Christina Debarry works most often with pastels, an uncommonly used medium that is gaining worldwide attention. In *Reflections* (2012-2014), part of her Night series,

Debarry drags individual sticks of color in a meandering pattern over the water, isolating the spectrum of colors during sunset. She accentuates their prominence in the foreground, calling attention to the materiality of pastel, its texture and feel, drawing the viewer in. Morozova and Zielyk are known for their impressionistic landscapes, although for this exhibition, Morozova is represented with a centuries-old tradition among painters: the artist self-portrait. Depicting herself engaged in her craft, Morozova holds the palette and her brush before the canvas, announcing to viewers the tools of her trade. Her adeptness and artistic style are conveyed through the manner in which the painting is rendered – in loose strokes of moderately thinned pigment, her white diaphanous blouse highlighted in shades of blue and accentuated with dry brush.

Marta Huley Legeckis showcases her precision as a calligrapher and a colorist in a number of Spanish architectural facades as well as interpretive images moving beyond naturalist concerns. *Torero Valiente* (2010) is an example of the latter, a multi-layered acrylic on canvas in which French and Spanish words and phrases – across the canvas of stained red shades and drips of paint, with swatches of dark red accumulated in the center – inform us of a Sunday afternoon bullfight, blood, and a brave *torero*. We are faced with the intensity and turmoil of the fight and left to react to its consequences through pictorial associations.

Still life’s fixedness, and the artist’s control over the lighting, depth, and composition of the indoor environment in which the objects are arranged, can have a liberating effect by freeing artists to explore issues of style and technique without constant management and adjustment of their subject. Tamara Skrypka tends to accentuate specific features in her still lifes, such as the highly saturated reds of apples or pears, or the leaves and buds of a flower bouquet, asserting their attention towards the front of the painting while the surrounding props – a vase, a tray – recede atmospherically in depth. Adrianna Tytla Henkels departs from this visual strategy, depicting loaves of bread with almost uniform detail across the picture plane. Every loaf is paid equal attention as an object. Their positioning upon and behind each other, lightening contrasts and shadows, imparts depth and creates visual tension with the hyperrealistic delineation of the bread crust, encrusted raisins, and salt on the surface.

Anya Farion’s *Bald Boy (from Chornobyl)* (1992) recalls the ancient Roman preference for portrait busts, yet here her subject is based on a photograph of a boy she read about in *The Ukrainian Weekly* newspaper. He was undergoing radiation treatment for cancer as a result of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster and had lost his hair. We are drawn to the boy’s uneasy and resigned expression, as he is seemingly unaware of his illness and its unpredictable outcome.

Moving beyond an adherence to naturalism’s close “true-to-life” rendering, abstraction provides a balance between retaining references to life and its experiences based on local observation, and involvement in the larger pantheon of modern artistic enterprises. Halyna Mazepa’s neo-Byzantine paintings of Ukrainian subjects, in which she combines folk art and icon painting techniques in a cubistic, illustrative mode, are an example. Saturated and flat color fields are placed alongside fields that are more subtly modulated with carefully placed brushstrokes or brightly

illuminated tones of light color. Each is carefully isolated, outlined like a stained glass windowpane, juxtaposing flatness and two-dimensionality with the sculptural quality of faceted planes, implying spatial depth. Such pairings of modern techniques and subject matter with which Ukrainians and diaspora Ukrainians would be familiar are demonstrated in the figure works of Sophia Zarytska, such as *Untitled (Man)*, as well as in Motria Holowinsky's *Mother and Child* (1990), a universal and often revisited theme. Holowinsky breaks the structural plane of her figures into multicolored facets to luminous effect, and creates a tension between the figure's outlined forms and their spatial compression.

Perhaps the greatest departure from referencing traditional themes are mythic subjects tied to nature and ancient belief systems and practices. They signify another point of entry for engaging mystical, magical realms, which happen to be common to Ukrainian folklore, but they also offer an avenue of escape into another world. Irma Osadsa depicts signs and symbols – a hand, a spiral, an eye, a twig – in an energetic swirl of textured patterns in *Talisman #26* (2011), as if to cast a spell. Likewise, Christina Pereyma's *Sampler, Yellow Series* (2006-2012) summons associations to hieroglyphs or a more formalized patterned code where object placement carries key significance. Her direct transfer rust printing technique imparts an aged quality, contributing to this overall effect. The artist's attunement to another world or parallel state of existence appears in Alexandra Kowerko's monoprint *Siren* (2011). In a lush, jungle-like environment, Kowerko creates an idyllic place where her nymphs and woodland creatures dwell. Color communicates the enlivened realm in which this siren resides, and Kowerko's rendering of both the figure and its flora within the same palette suggests they share an organic relationship. *Midsummer* by Inka Essenhigh is also escapist and fantasy-like, composed of a narrower range of color than Kowerko's work and with greater emphasis on the environment than on the central figure. What appears to be a massively sized single leaf above the figure draws the viewer into the picture plane with a shape we would recognize in nature, yet here distorted scale and deep green shadows upon a soft backdrop of blue conjure a milieu of which we are seeing only a glimpse, an untold narrative we may never witness in its entirety.

Many artists in the exhibition sought to move beyond community norms and experience in their work. Not only did art training in the 1950s and early 1960s operate outside such spheres, but the community represented something to be preserved and held on to, where fixedness was valued and encouraged. Art education at major art schools in the United States tended to focus on contemporary artistic developments and, once foundational courses covering artistic skills were mastered, moved towards encouraging artists to engage with life through the aesthetic issues of the day and respond visually to their changes. To a certain extent, working as an artist drew one away from the community's centripetal pull towards an ever-reimagined past and a desire to maintain things Ukrainian in sustained equilibrium.

The investigations into the abstraction of the New York School provided a new avenue of expression deliberately departing from representational modes of communication. Their narrative tendency and reliance on

recognizable, concrete forms largely predetermined how they would be understood by the viewing public. Seeking a mode of articulating an ever-refined, intuitive, and pristine spiritual connection without figuration became an agenda for such artists as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, while others, such as Willem de Kooning and Philip Guston, retained some of those figurative features. Sharing their artistic concerns, Natalia Pohrebinska addresses her dual cultural ties in her painting and poem *Awakening* (1988-2004). The painting's brushwork, viscosity, and engagement with color's expressivity speak to the language of the New York School with which she had emerged as an artist over two decades earlier, yet her poem situates its context as an enactment of realization and memory for a child born in Ukraine. Indeed, the painting was completed during the time of the 2004 Orange Revolution, and speaks to the convergence of past and present.

Early works by Arcadia Olenska-Petryshyn and Marta Hirniak Voyevodka, executed in the 1960s, similarly demonstrate a concern with integrating figurative and non-representational strategies in the mode of a number of New York School artists. In Olenska-Petryshyn's *Two Girls* and Hirniak Voyevodka's *Standing Figure* (1965) and *Conspiracy* (1961), color is used to block in a general shape for the figures, which are then superimposed with loose, broad brushwork and dripped paint. Figures are flattened in all three images, yet Olenska-Petryshyn highlights the figures with subtle shades and lines imparting a graphic quality, suggestive of her later interest in defining forms through distinct areas of flat color. Her painting *Dying Sagueros* (1991) exemplifies this aesthetic shift, as each variation of color is crisply delineated by an independent segment. Hirniak Voyevodka's figures are more color-modulated, and are softly rendered, focused on evoking a mood and social interactions, or the gestures of a single individual through a lens of quiet observation.

Formalism continued to be an important concern for artists in the 1960s and beyond, but additional issues came to the fore emphasizing the importance of areas of art that were considered minor, such as decorative arts, crafts, textiles, and printmaking, as well as art conventionally used as preparatory media for the "high arts" of painting and sculpture: drawing and photography. The political and social upheavals of this period, and the influence of the civil rights and women's rights movements, as mentioned earlier, effectively changed perceptions of how art was valued and the ways in which gender shaped understanding, and raised awareness of the level of rigidity regarding exhibition opportunities for women, ethnics, and people of color in major art galleries and museums. Their former minor status was now reversed, or at least on the ascendant. Alternative museums emerged, including the culturally specific or ethnic museum; craft and decorative elements were wholeheartedly embraced by artists such as Peter Voulkos, Miriam Schapiro, Judy Chicago, Joyce Kozloff, and many, many others. Printmaking, photography, and drawing garnered newfound interest in the world of high art, laying the groundwork for future artists to concentrate on these media – artists such as Olia Mishchenko, who explores spaces of neglect and abandonment in her drawings *Ravine World* (2014). Celebrating themes often associated with women's artistic practice – such as pattern, decoration, and flora, presented in Nina Klymovska's large-scale, brightly colored *Iris* (c. 1985) – became the norm, as did

incorporating autobiographical experiences or personal states, suggested in Sophia Lada's triptych *Desire* (1990). The heavy, geometric forms and monochromatic surfaces of masculine-associated Minimalist sculpture became a more widely accepted interest among women artists, as in Aka Pereyma's welded metal *A Pair* (1994), in the visual lineage of Brancusi's *The Kiss* (1916), as well as in Liliana Berezowsky's early industrial machine production series of the 1980s. In *L'Écriture Blanche* (1994), Berezowsky revisits her former interest in industrial materials with a conceptual sculpture based on Camus' title of the same name, demonstrating the encoding of history through text.<sup>12</sup> The White Arches paper book, bolted into the museum case, preserved in time, is blank – reminding us of the multiple lenses through which we may perceive events, the final version yet to be written. Humor proved to be a particularly effective strategy for addressing bias, with tongue-in-cheek wit a powerful but non-confrontational vehicle for reassessing the old habits of exclusion, self-seriousness, and discrimination in the art world. Executed three to four decades after the social and political shift in art, Kuchma declaratively challenges our views about what a tapestry "should be" in *So What* (2013). Scribbles across the picture plane, "so what" woven across the midline beyond the tapestry's borders as a frustration pronounced in passing, leave us to ponder art's purpose, our search for a revelation, or beauty, or significance in the art object a misplaced desire.

Pushing the limits of conventional craft media, such as fiber and clay, provided new creative and aesthetic possibilities little examined, while in painting, artists began further explorations by interweaving it with photographic principles, as in Ilona Sochynsky's photorealist *Carvel Ice Cream* (1986). The conventional boundaries within which traditional media had existed became a source for adding new elements for aesthetic exploration – an essentially intermedia phenomenon – resulting in more extensive research with mixed media, and shifting the vocabulary with which artists viewed their own work – by producing tapestries depicting the woven "brushwork" common to paintings, for example, or sculptures with the appearance of being woven from fiber. Alexandra Diachenko Kochman, Lialia Kuchma, VALYA, Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak, Sophia Lada, and Yulia Pinkusevich work with these precepts regularly. Diachenko Kochman's *Ancient Deity* (1992/c. 2005) may loosely recall a centuries-old relic from a long-transformed culture, even an ancient Ukrainian *baba* figure with its slit "eyes," but its emphasis lies in the sculpture's modulated textural treatment, torn coarse clay edge, and concave front. Its incised vertical nose and horizontal mouth, a partial gold halo imposing what remains of its circle above, lend a tone of humility to this survivor of old. VALYA similarly focuses on texture, touch, and implied movement in her fiber works, such as *Apron* (2003), effectively a role reversal for the typical apron's function as a cloth for catching spills and wiping one's dirty hands. Quilted and felted, glass beads carefully applied, *Apron* has become precious, delicate, seemingly fragile to the touch, like the paper-thin fiberglass sheath of Eva Hesse's sculptures. VALYA's is a testament to the hard work of the frequently female wearer, a token of beauty rarely acknowledged.

The prevalence of memory and a desire to make connections are universal themes. Difficult to articulate, imbued with nuance and changing details of the past, memories resist tangibility in one's mind yet offer concreteness

and accessibility through art objects. Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak's *What Sits in My Guts* (2008-2009) is a jarring allusion to the horror of the Ukrainian Holodomor famine genocide, conveyed through a child's embroidered garment. Narrative accounts of witnesses are stuffed into the body's cloth casing, a testament the artist has intertwined with her own past, her own entrails and core.<sup>13</sup> Sophia Lada's *Remember* (2007) is a homage to her mother, completed shortly after her passing. Lada and her mother embroidered the *rushnyk* (ritual cloth) together in 2005, when her mother was 96 and teaching her daughter embroidery techniques. The final outcome, represented here, charts their shared creative process and encapsulates the period of her mother's entry into her life as a widow.<sup>14</sup>

Two very different approaches are taken by Vaka Pereyma and Yulia Pinkusevich in grappling with recent atrocious national events: the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, and the Maidan protest and massacre of 2013-2014 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Pereyma, witnessing the toppling of the World Trade Center on television and in the news, was shocked by a reporter's statement, "men were just vaporized with the heat of the explosion."<sup>15</sup> The violence people could perpetrate on each other was unfathomable, leading her to create a new persona, "Vaporman," an iconic human being. She was compelled to ponder how he existed by exploring his actions and behavior: "what it does – stands, sits, sleeps, dances, loves, kills, dies, etc." and its shadow and silhouette.<sup>16</sup> Her *Sidewalk Shadow* series from 2009 is an outcome of that investigation: small-scale, intimate, collaged snapshots, present but not present, their individuality transmuted, one might say, by the textures, colors, and forms of which each figure consists. They are self-portraits, explorations of what remains when we are gone – ultimately, art.<sup>17</sup>

Pereyma's one-on-one desire to connect with humanness is juxtaposed with Yulia Pinkusevich's monumental *Silencing the Cacophony* (2015), depicting the attempt to erase humanity. It is a bold, angry cry illustrating the campout, riots, and dumbfounding violence of Maidan square. Completely obscured by gray and black tones in what appears to be ash, along with smoke from fired artillery, the painting is a three-dimensional experience boldly invading the viewer's space. We are drawn in, palatably sensing the chaos, unable to objectify the work as a contained visual experience. We are "there" in a sense, immersed, surrounded, and lost, as if on the Maidan itself, but obviously not so. In its own poignant manner, the work conveys the life of a diasporan, both there in Ukraine and here, wherever one presently resides.