

23.02

UKRAINIAN VOICES
DIGITAL ART & PHOTOGRAPHY



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

VIKA YASYNSKA

Participation of **Vika Yasynska** – Ukrainian photographer and correspondent in the exhibition “**23.02**” is the next part of her project “**The Portrait of a Soldier**” – a series of photos with soldiers who fought against Russia at the East of Ukraine since 2014. The project has already been presented in Ukraine and abroad.

The exhibition displays portraits of men who as volunteers or by call fought against the Russian army in the East of our country since 2014. The author recorded the stories of this war told by its participants.

At the same time Vika communicated a lot with the families of war victims. These interviews marked the beginning of the whole series of articles devoted to the mothers whose sons died during hostiles.

On February 24th 2022 since the beginning of the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine, the heroes of the interview again stood up for the defense of their Homeland and their people.

Unfortunately, many of those who fought against Russia in the East died during the fierce fighting and shelling in 2022.

By combining portraits and stories of **sons and mothers**, Vika seeks to show how determined and uncompromising Ukrainians are when it comes to protecting their native land, and how high is the price they pay for the freedom for their families.

With appreciation to the Ukrainian dubbing studio Postmodern for their support and preparing the English version of the memories.

And on the renovated land

There'll be no enemy, no rival,

*There **will be son and will be mother,***

There will be people on the land!

T. Shevchenko



Yaroslav Shamanov



Ruslan Borovyk



Andrii Verkhohliad



Andrii Startsev



Denys Antipov



Oleksii "Zhan Dnirovskyi" (call sign)



Svitlana Abramovych



Nataliia Kharchenko



Valentyna Kyian



Raisa Shanska

1 Yaroslav Shamanov

Commander of the 3rd Company of the 130th Battalion of Kyiv Territorial Defense. Date of death: 06/28/2022 (Constitution Day of Ukraine)

I'm from Kyiv. Since I was little I was always interested in history, warfare of different times and civilizations – especially the Viking era and, of course, the Ukrainian Cossacks. I was into martial arts and military games, particularly hardball.

Until winter 2013-2014 I used to live a calm hasteless life, the simple routine: work, home, wife, kids, cat. I used to make plans for the future. When the Revolution of Dignity began I had no big hopes for it: I thought, well, they'll shout there a bit and go away. But when everything became serious I couldn't stay at home. So in early March 2014 I went to the military enlistment office and signed up as a volunteer.

I couldn't stay aside. For many people this war came out as a shock. They say, how come our Russian brothers attacked us. I on the other hand profoundly studied history and knew that this war was inevitable. So somehow I was mentally ready for it.

From the story told by Yaroslav about the defense of Donetsk airport in 2015. At that time Yaroslav was the commander of the motorized infantry platoon of the 11th motorized infantry battalion "Kyivska Rus"

When we regained our positions, we began to fight back. Nearby we came across a head-wounded enemy and drew him to us. We started asking who he was and it occurred that he was from Russia. I precisely remember he said that he was Vova of St. Petersburg, from the Chkalovskaya metro station. He told his mother that he went somewhere to work as a lumberjack. We had no opportunity to evacuate him then, there were no doctors around. The only thing at hand was a first-aid kit and not everybody even had one, so he died there.

After everything I've been through, I can't imagine myself without the army. I can say that on the front line I discovered my true destiny – to fight and protect my people. I'm not afraid of killing enemies. Now I clearly understand that I'm a warrior by calling – I've been waiting for it for my whole life.

2 Ruslan Borovyk

Commander of the 95th Separate Air Assault Brigade, Lance Sergeant. Date of death: 04/30/2022

We've all grown up and old at this war. When I returned from Iraq (Ruslan was a member of peacekeeping mission in Iraq), I did not see a future here, I wanted to leave. However, later I changed my mind about leaving the country but was planning on working abroad from time to time. But now I don't want to do it either, despite the fact that I live in a dormitory with my family in 13 m² room. I'm not complaining. The only thing I'd like is to find another job. I graduated from the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs but at Yanukovich presidency times I didn't want to work there. Now they are hiring people to Drug Enforcement Department but I can't apply now due to my health problems. The contusion takes its toll. To tell the truth, I would really like to become a photographer.

I like living here, seeing people who I love, the nature, the city. I like to take part in the process of historical development of our new country. I'm not sure what exactly influenced me but I'm in love with Ukraine, it's closer and dearer to me than any foreign country.

3 Andrii Verkhohliad

Commander of the 3rd Battalion of the 72nd Separate Mechanized Brigade named after the Black Zaporozhians, Major.

People's Hero of Ukraine, awarded two Orders of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, III and II degree. Date of death: 06/22/2022

Before the assault my guys bought cigars, and told me that although they know I don't smoke but when we take "Almaz" (the position captured by the enemy nearby the town of Avdiivka retaken by the unit of the 72nd Brigade) we will act like soldiers in Hollywood films: we'll sit down, smoke cigars and talk about our life.

And on the 1st of February I received a message from the doctor who treated me after the wound. He wrote: "Congratulations, you have been awarded the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytsky III degree – you owe me a bottle". I'm flattered by the award of course but I don't think that I did something heroic back then. We completed the task, that's all. Maybe later, when I become older I will look differently at it, but that's our job.

As for the war and the future, I know how enemies hate our Brigade because we are immortal. So I would really like to hear the song of our 72nd Brigade in the streets of Donetsk someday.

4 Andrii Startsev

Company Commander of the 46th Separate Assault Battalion "Donbas", Sergeant (at the time of the interview - 2016).

Date of death – the end of February 2022

In 2014 I wanted to work as a driver of BelAZ dump truck, but the war disrupted my plans a little as I had to go to the front. A lot of men in our city ran around complaining that they were called to the army but I wasn't. So I went to the military enlistment office to ask why they forgot about me?

I was a driver at first, then in another unit I became the commander of a platoon base. And then, when our company commander resigned, the combatant appointed me as an acting officer, and I started the process of organizing a military service with strangers.

All the main events took place at our next strongpoint. Apart from us there were boarder troops. Eventually I selected the best of the entire contingent that was there. To establish a military service, I had to apply all the resources available. The most important thing is that nobody died at my strongpoint, in my company. I would feel devastated if my guys died due to some unsuccessful attack. What's the point in this? Such 20-year old soldiers will be the basis of our entire future army. A lot of young people go to the front and our main task is to guide their effort to the right direction, then we get a strong army.

5 Denys Antipov

Fighter of the 95th Separate Air Assault Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Lieutenant.

Date of death: 05/11/2022

This is the story of a man who dropped out of graduate school to go to the front and despite his love for teaching, had his own business. Denys was an aerial scout in the East, taught Korean at Shevchenko University and at the same time ran his own online store.

Military experience made me feel and understand some things. For example, it became easier for me to work under stressful conditions, I became more self-confident. In the army, you learn to find a way out by yourself and make quick decisions. You learn to work with people - and it's not easy. And it often happens that you don't have what it takes to complete a task, but you have to complete it. And the ability to find a solution in such situations helps you a lot in any matter of your civilian life in future. Well, and the most important is the understanding that those problems that seemed like problems before, in fact, are no problems at all. As long as everyone is alive and healthy, everything is fine.

6 Oleksii "Zhan Dniproviskyi" (call sign)

Fighter of the volunteer unit "Ukrainian Volunteer Army". Date of death: 06/13/2022

Before the war Zhan worked as a miner in the town of Ternovka for more than 10 years. Although in 2004 he had to leave his job as the management said either he supports Viktor Yanukovich or he is fired. But later, when Viktor Yushchenko was elected president, Oleksiy got his job back. (Referring to the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004 and the events of the Orange Revolution.)

When in 2014 Zhan's brother and cousin decided to go to the war he also made up his mind to go to the front. In 2015-2016 he fought in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and then joined a volunteer unit.

"I realized that volunteers – are the great force. I came to them in UVA (Ukrainian Volunteer Army), got

acquainted with my future commander and saw that he was a decent person. I thought that if there were more such people, we would win faster and with minimal losses. But I didn't join them at once because my parents were in their 70ties and had both their sons at war.

I got rid of the fear a long time ago. The boys and I we are not afraid of anyone except God. But you should not be afraid of him either because he is at our side and helps us. We'll all perish here if needed but our enemy already knows that there is no way for him to get here - because Ukraine is defended by real warriors.

7 Svitlana Abramovych

*Mother of the Commander of the tank platoon of the 30th Separate Mechanized Brigade, First Lieutenant **Artem Abramovych**.*

Date of death: 08/12/2014

I had no idea that at the beginning of August Artem and his platoon left for Stepanovka (a village in Donetsk region). And on the 5th of August Artem called me for a half a minute only. I was told later that just as they unloaded all their belongings into the dugout and went up to call their superiors, because there was no signal in dugout, there was an air assault and it burned everything in the dugout. He texted me afterwards: "Mommy, I'm fine, I can't talk, I'll call you back in the evening. I love you."

I got the last call from Artem on August 11th. Knowing how long it takes to reload multiple-rocket launchers "GRAD", he dialed me during the intervals between the shots so that I wouldn't hear them.

The searchers from "Evacuation-200" told me how Artem died. While collecting the bodies, they talked to the tractor driver, who was the witness to the events. It turned out that two tanks, one of them operated by Artem, covered the retreating troops, but soon Russian tanks attacked them. Our boys fired back while maneuvering across the field. They even managed to shoot one of the enemy's tanks. But then our second tank was shoot down or something, so it went to the forest belt. The guys told Artem that the muzzle had jammed - and he ordered them to retreat or evacuate. They were captured, but all returned home. Thus, Artem's tank was left alone, and another Russian T-72 went out at him. Then they had a collision. He shouted: "Goodbye guys, T-72s are coming at me."

8 Nataliia Kharchenko

*Mother of volunteer soldier **Yevhen Kharchenko**, scout of the 2nd Special Purpose Battalion "Donbas" of the National Guard of Ukraine*

Date of death: 08/29/2014

Yevhen's cousin Anton told Yevgen's parents what their son had been hiding from them: how Yevhen made up his mind to go to war, how he went to the military enlistment office for many times, but was told that there was no need for him now and was sent home. And then he found Battalion "Donbas" on the Internet and signed up as a volunteer. Anton tried to talk his cousin out of it but it was all in vain.

Mother's memories: "His decision to go to the war came as a shock to us. I remember I was hanging the laundry in the street and he had just come home. He looked very happy. He came to me, looked me in the eyes and said: "Mom, I need to talk to you". I understood everything at once, because Anton hinted before that Yevgen was up to something, and then I started crying. I told him: "Why are you going to the war? You don't like marching in formation and there you will have to follow the orders". And my son answered: "I will follow the orders if needed. Mom, you don't understand – it's my decision and I will go".

On June 3rd he left for the training ground. It hurt me very much and we didn't talk. I was scared by the fact that my child would take a weapon and shoot people. But the thing is that if you don't shoot you get shoot at.

So they have to defend themselves. He didn't go there to kill people; he went there to defend the country. It turned out that Yevhen was a real warrior!

I know that my son didn't die in vain, he did a lot of useful things. His comrades told me that he went to reconnaissance, behind enemy lines.

My son was a fighter for justice, he always helped everyone. He always bought the gifts to my husband and me when he got his salary, he was very caring. And independent. Yevgen was very mature, in a hurry to live a life. Sometimes he irritated me with his beliefs but now I understand that he was right. And now I became very much like him. And the most important for me is to hold up to these beliefs and not to betray my son. And it doesn't matter how much pain I feel in my heart, how deep my depression sometimes is, I will fight for justice and live like my son did".

I miss him so much. Sometimes I'm out of breath, I want to sniff his clothes. Now I understand how handsome he was. And he had a kind soul. And I also realized that we have to mollycoddle our children as we don't know what their life will bring them. I feel sorry for I haven't given him enough love and care.

But we've accepted Yevgen's position. He knows that we are always with him – even now we are with him. I am sure that when Yevhen went to the front he thought of me all the time. He knew how painful it will be for me if something happened to him but still he decided to defend Ukraine. I am proud of my son.

9 Valentyna Kyian

*Mother of the Capitan **Volodymyr Kyian**, Assistant Commander of the Battalion of the 80th Separate Air Assault Brigade.*

Date of death: 09/03/2015

A piece from Volodymyr's interview of 2015

The most memorable thing at the war for me is not the battles, but the loss of fighters. In the "Shtorm" (the unit where Volodymyr served before the 80th Brigade) I was the commander of an assault platoon. There I was with my fighters side by side all the time. I lost too many friends so I think that the hardest thing for me is still ahead – when I come to their graves. This is really the hardest at the war, and all the rest is just my job.

All of Ukraine must take a hard line and fight for its land for death. If we are the nation then we'll perish together, if we really stand for our integrity in the way that lots of us say. We have a unique chance, the one that we had 100 years ago – to stand up for our country. And now we are blowing it! But it shouldn't be like this!

A quote of Volodymyr's mother

He was a very decent man; he couldn't stand injustice.

In September 2014 during the battles near Metalist (Lugansk region) Volodia dragged his lads from the enemy's hands. I got to know about those battles near Metalist from TV. Our entire family nearly lost their mind. Later he told me how he jumped out of burning armored personnel carrier and the enemy fired a grenade launcher at him and his soldiers from a very short distance. On the one hand, Vova did not like to share his war experience with me so I would not get upset, but on the other hand, he wanted me to know that he did everything that a real military man should do.

Volodia was fearless and had very strong beliefs. Once I told him that they should leave that damn Donbas. And he said to me: "How you, my mother, can say that? That's our land from San till Don".

10 Raisa Shanska

*Mother of **Andrii Shanskyi** Senior Officer of the Department of the Public Order Protection Service Organization of the Northern Operational-Territorial Command of the National Guard of Ukraine, Major (posthumously).*

Date of death: 09/05/2014

Andriusha was going together with a column on a mission past the maternity hospital in the village of Granitny, where he was born. And he died near the Kalmius river. During the Second World War, also in August, but in 1941, in the same area, but on the other side of the river, his great-grandfather Andrii also died. My grandmother had three daughters, and she always used to say to me "If you have a boy, name him Andrii".

For six months after the funeral I was devastated. And for the first 10 days I just lay down. I didn't want to eat or drink or to take a shower – nothing. I was in complete blackout. My husband Kolia took me to a psychiatrist, and I asked him: "Could you, please, give me a pill so I would either sleep all the time or simply feel nothing." The doctor asked me what happened. And I told him everything about my son, and I cried so hard that my entire blouse was wet from tears. He listened to me and told that there is no pill for my grief and pain.

My husband turned out to be stronger than me. Step by step he helped me to get over this. He told me: "So, if you die now who will tell people about our Andrii?" I don't know where Kolia gained that strength but he dragged me out of that nightmare.

In spring of 2015 Kolia and I took some psychological trainings – and we started to move on. We read about various stressful situations and how people get through them. I delved into this area and it distracted me. We found a public organization for the families of war victims, later my husband was appointed as the Head of the Public Association "Yedyna Rodyna" (United Family). That's when we felt responsible not only for ourselves, but also for many other people who were touched by grief.

[Now I try to tell the mothers that when our boys were in trenches they knew that there was a person nearby who would help them. This is how we should live now, helping each other. This is our destiny.](#)

IRA ANDREICHUK

The war in Ukraine didn't start in February 22, it started in 2014. That year as a 17 year old college student, like many I took part in street protests in support of Ukraine joining the EU. The war started when Russia invaded the east of Ukraine & annexed Crimea. I grew up in the Precarpathian region in the west of Ukraine, the war in the Donetsk & Luhansk region was a back drop to my teenage years. Following my under graduate degree in a small town in the Carpathian mountains, I moved to Lviv where I completed my Masters degree in graphic design & book making. Following this, I moved home and worked for a local theatre as a photographer & graphic designer. At the outbreak of war the theatre became a bomb shelter and the stage was used to produce camouflage nets. The decision to leave was made following a conversation with an older woman from Donetsk, that I met while volunteering at the theatre. She urged me to leave, saying that she was too old to start again but that I was young and have my whole life ahead of me. She echoed my parents' sentiments, that leaving was the only way to stay safe & build a future. Reluctantly and with trepidation I placed an advert online and was contacted immediately by a woman in Scotland who offered me a room in her home. I arrived in Scotland on the 15th May and am now staying in West Lothian, in a small village, with two sisters and their two cats. Unexpectedly I have met with the most kindness than I have ever experienced. I have a haven now where I am physically safe but my mind is still in Ukraine. I hope in time and through my art that I can be whole again.

Ira Andreichuk



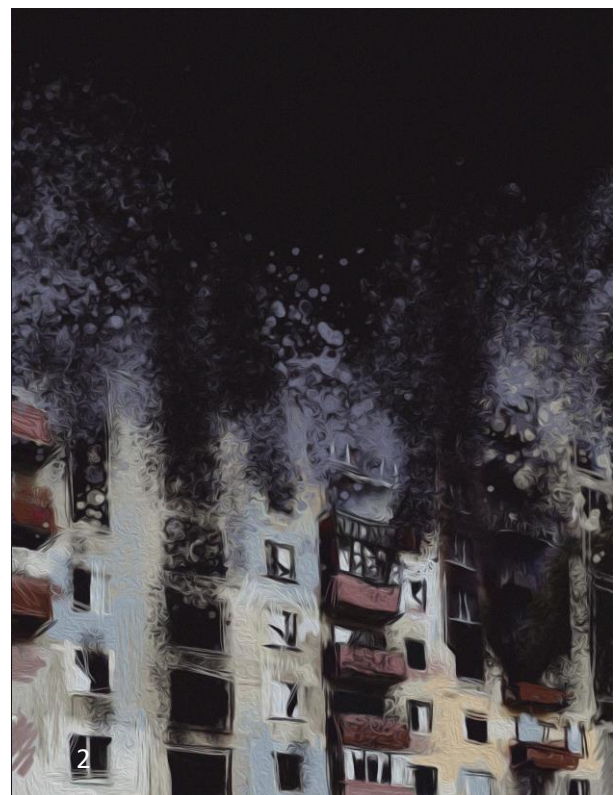
1 I was so used to the city being lit up at night that I didn't think about it, that was, until the lights were gone. The curfew started on the 24th of February, when all street lights were turned off and homes were shrouded in darkness.

Living in a street of six nine-floor buildings, the night sky was normally lit up like a Christmas tree. Yet from my bedroom window all I could see was the night sky with the moon & stars providing the only light.

That first night was terrifying; all I could do was stare into the darkness and listen to the deafening sound of air raid siren. I couldn't sleep, I kept my clothes on in case I had to run, but where too? Where do you hide, if nowhere is safe?

2 In those early days it was chaotic; some people packed everything in their cars and left their homes, some ran to grocery shops to buy food, some broke down. Nobody knew what was the right thing to do. All we knew was that we wanted to survive. Our next-door neighbour suffered from hysteria, she knocked repeatedly on our door, crying "we have to run, this building is too weak, if it gets bombed, it will fall and we will all die immediately". She was saying what we were all thinking. Where do you go when the one place that should be safe – your home, isn't any more?

I would wake from realistic nightmares of my tower building falling and of my family & neighbours being killed in the bombing. I was so tired but was too scared to sleep. I kept thinking where can I hide, where is safe when the whole country is under attack?



3 Our neighbour from the 7th floor was a military man. Although he had retired, he immediately re-joined his unit after the first major Russian attack. Sadly, he was killed within a month in an intense battle near the capital.

His and his comrade's bodies were brought home for burial. In spite of it being in the middle of the night, during curfew, we were allowed to gather in the town centre to pay our last respects. Everything was dark, half the town was there, with only our hand held candles and the stars for light. The bells from the nearby church rang out playing "Plyve kacha" a traditional mournful folk song. It wasn't a funeral but it was the best we could do. We came to show our respect to our fallen heroes; who just some short weeks ago, had been our neighbours, ordinary men, who had died for their country and for us.



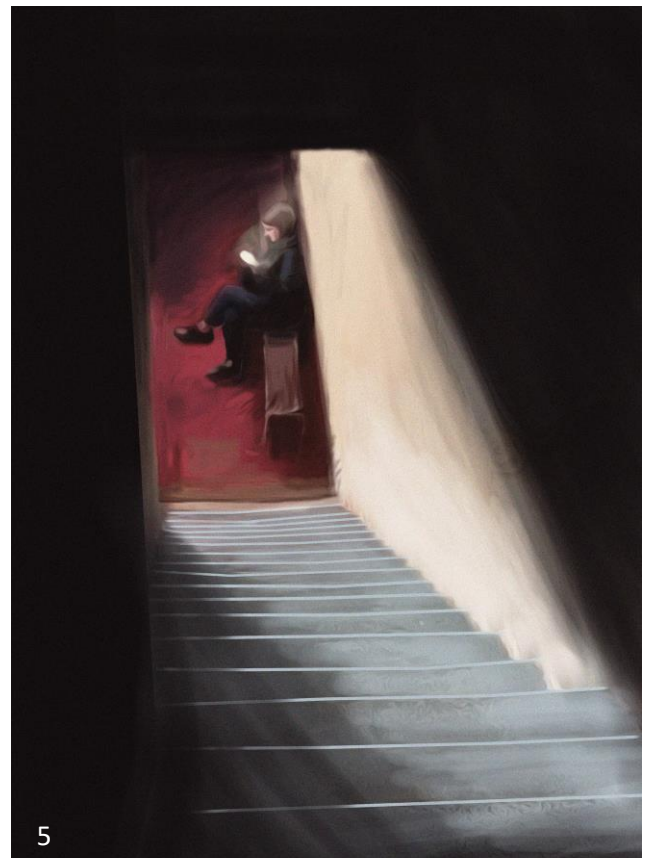


4 You never get used to the air raid siren – no matter what you are doing, every time it feels like the sky becomes heavy and the air too thick. And if there are no sirens, we still have the phantom ones in our heads. Each time the same feelings of fear, anger & desperation.

This building is in one of the main streets of my hometown. That balcony was painted blue & yellow in 2014, I would walk past it frequently and it always reminded me of ongoing struggle for freedom.

5 When we heard the air raid sirens, we would run to the air raid shelters or to our basements. There, people would scroll through the news on their phones, some would cry, others staring at the clock counting the hours till we could leave others would just sit in silence

During one such raid, I realized, we're all having the same thoughts, but we can barely put them into words, as if to speak it out would make it real, so we sit and say nothing.



6 Within the first weeks despite the chaos and jumbled emotions, the people started to organise, to find a way, no matter how small to help the soldiers. We all wanted to help, to do our bit to stop this war. I sewed camouflage material on to large nets to hide our tanks. As I sewed I thought of our soldier's bravery & sacrifice, of the loss of their lives to protect all we Ukrainians hold dear. I hoped it would be enough.

Many thanks to everyone who helped to make the 23.02 Ukrainian Voices exhibition happen.

23.02 UKRAINIAN VOICES EXHIBITION



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