

The Arts of War: Ukrainian Artists Confront Russia

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Unexpected Artists

Beyond the art galleries, concert halls, and opera stages of professional artistry, tens of thousands of Ukrainians have turned to the arts for sanity and solace during the hardships of war. Together, their creative reactions to national—and all too often personal—trauma has fueled their ability to survive, resist, and recover. Their collective creativity nurtures an inspirational base that will serve the country well when peace arrives. The painter Andrii Bychkov is just one among thousands of Ukrainians whose embrace of the arts has sustained them during this brutal conflict.

Bychkov's biography might not suggest his compelling use of a paint brush to add beauty to the world. A graduate of the National University of Internal Affairs, the fifty-something Bychkov served for twenty years in the Ministry of Emergency Situations rising from cadet to colonel. Witnessing life's cruelty firsthand, he turned to art to as a refuge to preserve his humanity.

Upon retirement, he went to work in the gaming industry where he created graphics, designed interfaces, and produced animations. These efforts rekindled an older dream of becoming a creative artist. He observes that during this time he grew from a gamer to a concept artist to an artistic director. By the early 2010s, he [had turned](#) to watercolor and oil painting. Each stage prepared him for his wartime endeavors.

The 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine intensified Bychkov's commitment to his art. Believing that life is bright, memorable, beautiful, and fragile, he wanted to share his love of nature at a time when everything that he admired was coming under threat. He wanted to convey his sense that joy contains within it the meaning of life. He wanted to help people keep that flame alive. This commitment becomes even more startling as his home in Kropyvnytskyi has often come under attack.

Like many among the city's 220,000 residents, he has remained at home. Bychkov similarly continues to be faithful to his artistic vision.

Posting on Facebook, he [notes](#): "My main goal in art is to convey to people that joy is not just an emotion, but the meaning of life. And even such a terrible test as war cannot extinguish this flickering flame."

Bychkov's artworks offer a colorful, simplified vision of life, be they landscapes, provincial townscapes, or vases full of flowers. There is neither a twinge of abstraction nor a suggestion of a folk motif in his work. He simply shares what he sees: a straightforward world full of color, beauty, and warmth. His is a world of perpetual Spring offering a deceptively simple balm for the pains of war.

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As Bychkov's artistry moved from refuge to vocation to new heights of professionalism, his painting empowered him to imagine a different world. His Ukraine would be a gentle place full of color, kindness, and beauty. This vision foresees a peacetime Ukraine that can move beyond the trauma of war to emerge as a country overflowing with joy.

Bychkov is but a single voice among millions, and perhaps not a realistic one. However, he hardly is alone, as tens of thousands of Ukrainians similarly have turned to artistic expression in endless forms to find relief from the horrors unfolding around them. Collectively, they promote a search for fresh imaginary horizons. Like all horizons, the joy and beauty Bychkov promotes might be unattainable. The collective pursuit of such gentleness, however, opens a window on a postwar Ukraine that is unlike prewar Ukraine. The grassroots embrace of beauty created by everyday Ukrainians represented by Bychkov could well infuse postwar life with a sense of promise.

