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Innocence Shattered: 'Soviet Childhood' Artist Captures War in Ukraine

By RFE/RL - April 26, 2022



Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi, "Teenage Rebellion", 2022.

A Ukrainian-Israeli painter famous for images of her childhood in Kyiv has painted the ongoing war in her homeland.

On February 24, Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi says she felt as if her own memories were being invaded as she watched news coverage, from her home in Israel, of Russian missiles exploding and tanks moving on the Ukrainian capital. Shortly afterward, the artist began painting the Russian invasion of Ukraine in images that reference her famous Soviet Childhood series.

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A 2022 painting of a railway compartment crammed with Ukrainian civilians fleeing the war.



A 2015 painting titled To The South, showing women with their children heading toward Ukraine's Black Sea coast on a sleeper train.

Cherkassky-Nnadi told Israeli media that she had been in Ukraine just four months before the invasion to look for landscapes and familiar scenes that she could use in future paintings depicting her childhood. A 2015 painting titled To The South, showing women with their children heading toward Ukraine's Black Sea coast on a sleeper train.

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A 2022 painting of a snow-covered village burning as a child rushes to the aid of its mother.



The same location drawn in 2016 from Cherkassky-Nnadi's memories of summertime in rural Ukraine.

The Israeli-Ukrainian artist had relatives inside Ukraine when full-scale war broke out and, after waiting to see if the situation would improve, her sister eventually decided to flee the country to Moldova. On March 4, the artist's sister, two nieces, and two great-nieces arrived in Israel.

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This 2022 painting of a Ukrainian mother saying goodbye to her military-volunteer son amid the Russian invasion echoes an earlier painting of Cherkassky-Nnadi's memories from 1980s Kyiv.



A 2016 painting called Teenage Rebellion showing a cramped Soviet-era apartment.

Now the Israeli-Ukrainian is raising money for the Ukrainian Red Cross through sales of her art, and said in a recent Facebook comment "my body is in Israel but I'm in Ukraine."

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A 2022 painting depicting the aftermath of an attack on a school in Ukraine.



This 2015 painting Roundelay shows schoolgirls in traditional dress dancing in front of a wall decoration of birch trees.

Cherkassky-Nnadi was 14 when she left Kyiv with her family for a new life in Israel just two weeks before the U.S.S.R collapsed in 1991. The artist has since been based in Berlin and Tel-Aviv.

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A 2022 painting of young Ukrainian women busy weaving camouflage netting needed for the war effort.



A 2016 painting of girls making their own clothing in a Soviet apartment in the 1980s.

Although her series on Soviet childhood is ongoing, Cherkassky-Nnadi says she hopes the related work depicting the war will be a short-lived project.