

CAMERA OBSCURA

VOLOSHYN GALLERY | 14.04.2023 - 21.05.2023

Voloshyn Gallery re-opens in Kyiv, Ukraine with the group exhibition Camera Obscura.

Participants: Krasimira Butseva, Open Group artist collective, Nikita Kadan, Lesia Khomenko, Brilant Milazimi, Mila Panic, Vlada Ralko and Yevgen Samborsky.

This exhibition is an attempt to show light in the darkness blacking out Ukraine, refracted through the prism of works by artists who explore the media of photography and stress its importance in the context of war.

Camera obscura is a prototype of a photo camera. It is a lightproof box with a small hole in one side and a screen on the opposite side. Passing through the hole, rays of light create an inverted image on the screen. Having been used as a device for projecting images of outside objects onto a piece of paper, camera obscura gave rise to the history of photography.

In this exhibition, the interior of the Voloshyn Gallery is metaphorically transformed into a black chamber, with the artists' works representing rays of light. Their dialogue creates a nonlinear connection between the intuitive and the explorative and brings forth associations that far outreach the visible perspective.

The exhibition emphasizes the personal fears that the war arouses in each of us. It examines the feelings of humanness and dignity in light of the ever-present existential conflict between the personal need for safety and striving for freedom. Camera Obscura invites the viewer to submerge into darkness lying somewhere between the past and present, at the same time forced and hidden, corporeal and sensual, private and political, bringing together real life and the process of conceptual reasoning.

The exhibition starts with the large-scale photographic piece by **Nikita Kadan**, entitled *The Pass* (created with the participation of Anton Sayenko). It is an immense image of a closed underpass of a subway station in Kyiv. For nearly a month, the station has been used as a bomb shelter for hundreds of people. Now, the underpass became a silent area, a place removed from urban life. The war brings about complex types of wastelands and patterns of exclusion, composing the memory of darkness that will stay even when life comes back to normal.

The painter **Lesia Khomenko** engages in a dialogue with this work and presents a painting based on Kadan's photography taken in March after a missile strike hit the Lukianivka district of Kyiv. In her piece entitled *Mannequins Exiting Storefronts Shattered by Missiles and Going to Kill Russians*, Khomenko explores dehumanization, i.e. the ways in which we are changed by the constant flow of photos depicting dead enemies. She also reflects on how the feelings that ensue are completely inexplicable to the Western world. The artist deliberately chooses to depict "peaceful" objects that become a kind of "clues" allowing a person unfamiliar with the experience of a war to grasp better understanding of it.

The works included in the *Lviv Diary* series are a response to the daily horrors of war, created using the "fast technique" of watercolor and ball pen sketching. They present **Vlada Ralko's** critical view on the Russian aggression and genocide of the Ukrainians. It is worth noting that *Lviv Diary* is a follow-up to the earlier series *Kyiv Diary*, which was created in 2013-2014 during the Revolution of Dignity; it comprised, among others, pieces created in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the commencement of warfare in the east of Ukraine.

Criticism of the field of interaction continues in the work *You Did Not Train Me Enough for This Fight* by artist **Brilant Milazimi** from Kosovo. The plot relies on a combination of individual and collective memory, offering an intuitive analysis of contemporary conditions of struggle and negotiation, balancing feelings of hope, freedom, and fragmentation of reality. Milazimi's work is neither allegorical nor anecdotal. It is a visually powerful articulation of the suppressed, where social interaction is easily overshadowed by deeper tensions. He transforms his perception of the world around him into images that are bitter, funny, tender, and strange all at once. Driven by the mechanism of the unconscious and inspired by imagined universes, he finds ominous and poetic expressions to approach the society in which he lives.

The work *Frequencies of Trauma* by Bulgarian multidisciplinary artist **Krasimira Butseva** explores history, memory, trauma, and political violence associated with Bulgarian communism. The artist assumes the roles of anthropologist, sociologist, and historian, challenging the democratizing qualities of photography and digital imagery, and demonstrating the inability of objective representation through photography and digital images. The democratic nature of image dissemination moves photographic representation from the realm of aesthetics to that of human interaction, and therefore, politics. In *Frequencies of Trauma*, history is told through objects and images, and the artist is an active participant in their collection, curation, and preservation. In this work Krasimira Butseva questions the role of cultural and political institutions and their active neglect in critically examining the problematic past of the communist regime in the current transitional period. The images represented in *Frequencies of Trauma* are often incomplete, distorted, and fragmented, existing in a transitional space between conflict and resolution. Through this technique, Butseva captures the liminal nature of memory and history..

The second part of the exhibition display begins with the multimedia project entitled *Backyard*, the artist collective **Open Group**. The work reflects on the eponymous notion that implies privacy and property, the feeling of safety. Safety ensured by walls, by the law of private property and law in general. This brings about the notion of home as a place that only belongs to its dweller, as opposed to everything that surrounds it, belonging to others and being less private and safe. A backyard is also the only place that stays after a house is demolished, wiped off the face of the earth. This work allows the viewer to take a look at a house destroyed by war. For the participants in the project who have lost their own homes, this is an attempt to imagine and recreate them in their minds.

Engaged in a dialogue with the works by Open Group is the minimalist yet eloquent painting by **Yevgen Samborsky** entitled *Never Again... and Again*, created specifically for the exhibition. From the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the artist has been paying attention to the way our smartphones mix private photos with images of destroyed buildings, war memes, pictures of dead Russian soldiers, screenshots of requests for help, etc. This painting refers to the photo of a graffiti by an unknown author. The slogan "Never again" is mostly associated with the Holocaust, a systematic murder of the Jewish people committed by the Nazis. For 80 years, this notion has been pervading genocide studies and practices of commemoration, which significantly contributed to the (sadly mistaken) belief that accumulation of knowledge with its subsequent encoding into sociocultural rituals will prevent the recurrence of genocides. When the Second World War ended, the civilized world said, "Never again." In 2022 this slogan failed to work. Moreover, on March 1, 2022, when Russian missiles and shells hit the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center during the battle of Kyiv, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky said that "Never again" means keeping talking about the Russia's aggression to prevent history from repeating itself.

The second part of the exhibition features the work *Strawberry Field* by Bosnian artist **Mila Panic**, whose practice focuses on exploring the theme of fear and its transformation. During a visit to her hometown of Brcko in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, the artist discovered that one of the minefields near her hometown had finally been cleared and returned to its owner. The owner attempted to create a business by planting a strawberry field on the previously dangerous land, but this endeavor failed due to frequent theft of the strawberries by local villagers. This sudden change in attitude towards the field, which had been a dangerous zone for two decades, intrigued the artist. She visited the field, picked strawberries, and made jam out of them. *Strawberry Field* represents a space of possibilities where the healing of both physical and social landscapes is demonstrated. This transformation also symbolizes the healing of collective memory and the perception of the recent history of the territory..

Opening: April 14, from 6-8 pm
Voloshyn Gallery, Tereschenkivska 13, Kyiv, Ukraine