

Art **Reviews**

The Many Faces of Ukrainian Photography Today

In *Ukrainian Photography Today* the now and then come into intimate contact to reveal a story about one's roots and uprootedness.



Lev Feigin November 2, 2022

Share



Oksana Parafeniuk, "Untitled" (2016), from the series *Wooden Box of Photographs* (all images courtesy the artist and The Print Center)

PHILADELPHIA — *Ukrainian Photography Today*, though small (it includes 23 images in all), packs quite a punch. Organized by Irina Glik, a Ukrainian-American photographer and writer from Kyiv, and the Print Center's curator, Ksenia Nouril, the show features work by four woman photographers from different regions of Ukraine.

Most of the works on view cast a backward glance at the eight-year-long armed conflict that was a prelude to Russia's full-scale, brutal invasion of Ukraine last February.

Some common themes echo across the show — a search for national and personal identity; childhood, youth, and motherhood in wartime; loss and reconnection — but the exhibition is less an exploration of a unified motif than a representation of the different conceptual and aesthetic frameworks in which artists are working in today's Ukraine.



Alena Grom, "Ancestral Ward. Donbas. Selidovo / Entrance to the Cemetery. Donbas. Novotroitsk," from the series *Pendulum* (2018)

War is omnipresent in powerful diptychs by Alena Grom, a documentary photographer who was born in Donetsk and fled the Donbas region in 2014. Each photograph displays the formalist detachment of someone who has been made an outsider in her own land, combined with the deep sympathy and identification of a native who has watched Russia's destruction and merciless repression of her own region and people. The diptychs, from the series *Pendulum*, pair an image of a wartime ruin with a child's portrait. The one exception is a bleak Soviet-era hospital ward set against an image of an Orthodox cemetery. The cemetery's rounded, blue-green gate echoes the ward's metal bed in shape and color — the two silent tableaux hinting at the interconnection that exists between their spaces.

Yelena Yemchuk's work is an immigrant's love letter to Odesa. Yemchuk left her native Kyiv for the United States in the early 1980s and traveled to Ukraine extensively after the Maidan revolution to document Odessan youth — teenagers undergoing military training, young lovers, kids searching for themselves in a country searching for a new, post-Soviet identity. Her photographs read like film stills: they beckon viewers to tease out the bigger stories and lives coiled inside their frozen milliseconds.



Yelena Yemchuk, "Lera," from the series *Odesa* (2016)

Kateryna Yermolaeva turns inward to explore her own conflicting polyphony of what she calls her “sub-personalities”: nine avatars — women, men, nonbinary people, children — each with a unique name, character traits, dress, and props that embody some aspect of the artist’s life. The project is both a self-inquiry and an attempt to find deeper resonances between one’s fractured inner landscape and the myriad facets of Ukraine’s collective psyche.

Oksana Parafeniuk bridges decades of time in a single image. In a series entitled *Wooden Box of Photographs*, the artist fuses her own family’s black and white Soviet-era pictures with modern-day portraits of a Ukrainian family displaced by the war. Embedding the displaced family members, who have recently lost their home, into images of her own distant family past, she shelters the refugees in the nooks and crannies of memory. The *now* and *then* come into intimate contact to reveal a story about one’s roots, uprootedness, and the power of connection across time.



Kateryna Yermolaeva, “Edik,” from the series *Me, Myself, and I* (2018)

[Ukrainian Photography Today](https://hyperallergic.com/772005/ukrainian-photography-today-the-print-center/) continues at *The Print Center (1614 Latimer Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)* through November 12. The exhibition was curated by Dr. Ksenia Nouril with Irina Glik as exhibition advisor.

<https://hyperallergic.com/772005/ukrainian-photography-today-the-print-center/>