

J.T. Blatty

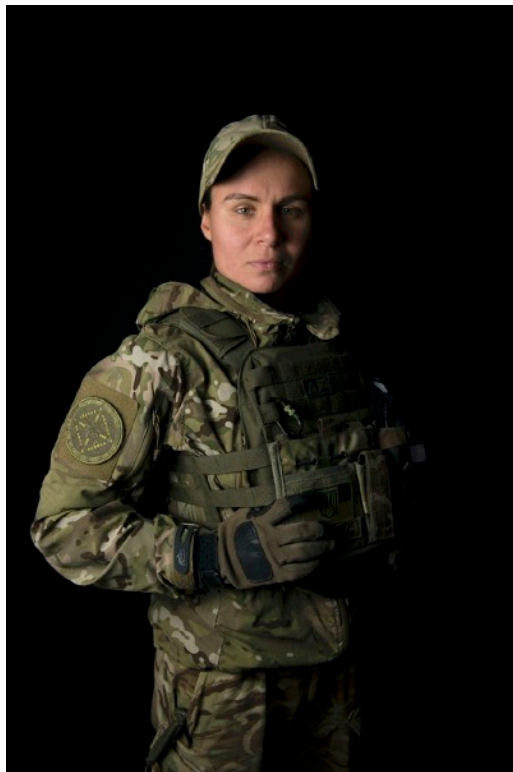
Frontline / Peace Life: Ukraine's Revolutionaries of the Forgotten War

January 16 – March 8, 2020

Opening reception for the artist: Thursday, January 16, 6:00 to 8:00pm

The Ukrainian Institute of America 2 East 79th Street New York, NY 10075

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NEW YORK — Art at the Institute is pleased to announce *Frontline / Peace Life*, an exhibition of photographic portraits by J.T. Blatty, chronicling a generation of volunteer soldiers of the war in eastern Ukraine and their stories of a return to a marginalized existence, “peace-life,” as the war with Russian-backed separatives moves into its sixth year without resolution. The exhibition opens January 16 and will continue through March 8, 2020. Co-curated by Walter Hoydysh, PhD, Director of Art at the Institute and J.T. Blatty, this marks Blatty’s first solo showing with The Ukrainian Institute of America (UIA). An opening reception for the photographer will take place on Thursday, January 16 from 6:00 to 8:00pm.

In the 20th to 21st centuries, photography, television and later, the internet brought war home — making viewers acutely aware of the flesh-and-blood consequences of battles, bombings and firefights. For photographers and camera operators, that meant being on the frontline, under fire and in the thick of things. J.T. (Jenn) Blatty’s work begins closer to home with forgotten veterans who have brought the war in eastern Ukraine home — in memories, flashbacks, dreams and nightmares — after the physical violence has subsided yet before

the psychological turmoil has settled, and before the societal detachment begins. She tells a different kind of story. One that challenges the idea of what a war story is.

Since 2014, over 4,500 Ukrainian soldiers have died in the undeclared war in eastern Ukraine, and over 360,000 have fought and returned home to the “peace-life.” But these figures only account for soldiers who were formally registered (documented) in the Ukrainian Armed Forces or in “volunteer” battalions that were eventually integrated under Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense. There are still thousands of unaccounted men and women who fought or fought and died in 2014 and 2015, during the most violent seasons of the conflict, before it turned to the trench style warfare of World War I that it remains today. For those who survived, they must fight through red tape in courtrooms to attempt achieving “combat participant status,” a label that would grant them access to underfunded and underequipped state support for the psychological and physical distresses of war, including brain injury.

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Many of them continue to serve on the frontline, not able to find their place within the “peace-life,” not able to abandon a purpose that they and their fallen comrades risked everything for in the beginning.

There is nothing sensationalistic about Blatty’s photographs. She is out to reveal the inner life of her subjects. This means giving her subjects the freedom to appear as who they think they are. Unlike other portraitists, Blatty does not want to surprise her subjects and catch them in a moment that reveals something they would rather conceal. Invariably her subjects stare directly into her camera and make eye contact with the viewer in a frame free from distractions. In her pictures, they stand honorably in their impatation, but neither coy nor seductive. They stare at, rather than away from, the viewer, making it, in turn, impossible to look only at their uniforms and folk-style garb. This same preoccupation with dignity is central to Blatty’s intent as a chronicler.

Blatty states, “I came to Ukraine as a U.S. combat veteran and photojournalist two years ago, drawn to the community of the soldier, inspired to document and preserve a form a patriotism that was so far from my own reality of fighting wars, under contracted obligations. There is a common thread amongst most war veterans around the world, an ultimate realization that in our wars, we were pawns in a larger agenda that we might never understand. The volunteers were not pawns in 2014, but now their story needs to be told more than ever, because their story is so far from over.”

Former U.S. Army Captain J.T. (Jenn) Blatty graduated from The United States Military Academy at West Point. She is a 2002-03 combat veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq, the author of *Fish Town: Down the Road to Louisiana’s Fishing Communities*, a photojournalist, and FEMA disaster reservist photographer whose articles and photo-graphs have been published in Bloomberg Magazine, National Geographic, PDN Magazine, Smithsonian Magazine, Savannah Magazine, The Daily Beast/Newsweek, The Oxford American, and CNN Photos amongst others. Since early 2018, she spent months embedded in the war in eastern Ukraine, working with Ukraine’s volunteer soldiers and veterans of the war in Donbas. Her project, *Frontline, Peace Life: Ukraine’s Revolutionaries of the Forgotten War*, was previously exhibited at the Ukrainian National Museum of Chicago (May 2019).

Exhibition hours: Tuesday to Sunday, 12:00 – 6:00pm, or by appointment.

For further information: Please contact Olena Sidlovych, Executive Director, at (212) 288-8660 or mail@ukrainianinstitute.org.

Image: J.T. Blatty, *Nadia Pikhay* (‘Conner’), dye sublimation print mounted on aluminum, 30 x 20 in.

About Art at the Institute

Celebrating its sixty-sixth year of activity, Art at the Institute is the visual arts programming division of The Ukrainian Institute of America. Since its establishment in 1955, Art at the Institute organizes projects and exhibitions with the aim of providing postwar and contemporary Ukrainian artists a platform for their creative output, presenting it to the broader public on New York’s Museum Mile. These heritage projects have included numerous exhibitions of traditional, modern and contemporary art, and topical stagings that have become well-received landmark events.

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