

Ukrainian artist's experience of living in Ireland explored in new solo exhibition

Explore the vibrant artistry of Olga Melnykova at her solo exhibition 'Ireland: Puzzles' hosted by Wicklow Town Library

Olga Melnykova's solo exhibition 'Ireland; Puzzles' opened in Wicklow Town Library on August 2nd and runs until August 30th. It's Olga's first solo show since the successful launch of her first solo show in Dublin, 'Puzzles of life', back in April 2023. With that exhibition, Olga tried to explain how it felt to be trying to put your life back together since fleeing the war and coming for the first time to the Emerald Isle.



Olga Melnykova and some of her artwork.



Olga Melnykova with Gabriel Murray at her exhibition in Wicklow Library.

After this successful launch, Olga has been actively working on her another artistic puzzles, focusing primarily on her perception of Ireland, that has become her second home.

The show mixes several techniques in a bid to represent that life may be full of bright colours, new perspectives and interesting opportunities, as long as you stay strong and motivated.

Olga explained: "This exhibition represents my vision and my personal experience of living in Ireland, its traditions, symbols, beautiful landscapes, but what's more important - its kind people who have helped Ukrainians a lot in those difficult times. It's a way to say thank you to Irish people for having opened their homes and hearts for us."

Speaking in Wicklow Library at Olga's exhibition, Gabriel Murray spoke of the connections in the art world between Ireland and Ukraine. Mr Murray is an Associate of the Courtauld Art Institute in London and a member of the Art History Association of Ireland.

"The United Arts Club, in Dublin in 1907, was founded by Countess Constance Gore Booth and other artists. One artist was her



Gabriel Murray speaking at Olga's exhibition launch in Wicklow Library.

future husband Count Casimir's Markievitz, a Polish-Ukrainian count, they visited his family estate near the village of Zhy-votivka in Ukraine, in 1903," he explained.

"The Ukraine Ambassador in Ireland plans to build a museum to them there, in order to create stronger links between our two countries. Casimir Makievitz paintings can be found in the club and the National Gallery of Ireland. He was the first Ukrainian artist to be exhibited here - over a hundred years ago.

"Liviv where Olga comes from is on the western border of the Ukraine, which is quite close to Poland. This part of the Ukraine used to be part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in the 16th century. So there is a considerable influence of European art in this region.

"They have a major art collection bigger than most galleries in Europe. I visited the Lviv Art Gallery, it has 62,000 artworks in its collection, including works of Ukrainian, Polish, Italian, French, German, Dutch and Flemish, Spanish, Austrian and other European artists.

Olga visited this museum and I am sure it inspired her art. I also visited the Kiev Art Gallery that has 40,000 art objects. Also Odessa Art Gallery has 10,000 works [...] Many of these works have gone into storage due to the war. The famous English Art historian Waldemar Januszczak, who you will see published in the Irish Times Culture Magazine and on the BBC, went there in April 2022, during the war, and made a documentary on Liviv Art Museum's, and the secret storage of the art works. This

museum I visited the year before.

"The Ukraine has the most extraordinary churches, full of gold ikons and murals that have been influenced by Byzantine art, that was created 5th century AD, and continued to exist until the fall of Constantinople, to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. Our most distinguished poet W.B Yeats was fascinated by Byzantine churches and gold ikons. He wrote a poem about it Sailing to Byzantium. Olga has mentioned her love of Yeats work.

"The Countess of Desart a Jewish woman that lived in Kilkenny, was involved in the rescue along with her banker father, and Baron De Hirsch. I investigated this in my book on the Countess. They donated over 300 million euros to this cause if Ukrainian emigration in the 19th century. This Anglo-Irish charitable cause is now lost to history.

"There have been many exhibitions of Ukrainian artists in Ireland in the last few years. One of the first I can find recorded was 12 October 2010 the exhibition 'Ukraine through the eyes of Irish artists, Ireland through the eyes of Ukrainian artists' was opened in Dublin. The event was organized by the Embassy of Ukraine in Ireland at the premises of the European Commission Representation in Ireland."

Speaking about Olga's work he said "Olga's work is unique. Her art combines imagery of the Ukrainian folk art with modern abstract art like Malevitch and also Picasso. It's a kind of combination of abstract with the use of traditional Byzantine ikons, and imagery like sunflowers,

which is the national symbol of the Ukraine. The beautiful patterns that she painted are based on the traditional Ukrainian clothes and fabrics; known as Reshetlyivka embroidery. More recently her landscape has been influenced by Ireland and the art of Paul Henry, who painted the great landscapes in the west of Ireland, around 1910.

"Olga's work is a combination of the old and the new. It's an interesting marriage, bridging two forms of art that originated in the Ukraine. One that belonged to a traditional folk culture and the other to the modern area. In this show Ireland and the Ukraine art form are connected and fused together.

"Her work here is also about puzzles, that she refers to in her catalog, that reflects the fragments of the many Ukrainian lives; that this current war has affected. These paintings reflect the impact it has had on their lives that have been torn apart by this terrible war."

Running from August 2nd to the 30th, this captivating display invites you to delve into a series of intricate paintings that weave together elements of Ireland's landscapes and cultural motifs.

Olga is popular contemporary artist, having had her solo exhibitions in Kyiv, Ukraine, participating in charity projects and creative collaborations. Her works are represented in private collections in France, Italy, Monaco and USA.

You can find out more about Olga's are on Instagram via her handle @art_studio_platon.