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Frieze Los Angeles 2024 // News

## Ukrainian dealer gives the country's emerging artists a foothold in Hollywood

Lia Snisarenko launched Art Access in her home last September to showcase contemporary art from Ukraine



Lia Snisarenko's show, *Shadows of Us*, features four Ukrainian women artists; after the Russian invasion, the dealer was trapped in her parents' basement for a month

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Sophia Kishkovsky

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Lia Snisarenko, an art adviser from Kyiv, was living in Los Angeles with her fiancé when she went home to visit her parents, as it turned out shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. She was trapped in their village house in the Russian-besieged Chernihiv region, without heat, electricity or phone service, until an art collector-turned-Ukrainian fighter was able to pass on to her a treacherous exit route.

Once she returned to the US, Snisarenko used art as part of the therapeutic process by which she overcame the trauma of the war. She will be showing the work of four young Ukrainian women artists—Inna Kharchuk, Anna Veriki, Liza Zhdanova and Iryna Maksymova—in a show called *Shadows of Us* at her West Hollywood home gallery, Art Access, concurrently with Frieze Los Angeles. The show opened on 24 February, the second anniversary of the Russian invasion.

Snisarenko opened Art Access in September 2023 with a mission in mind. "I am spreading the word about Ukrainian talent," she says. "I didn't want to make it too political. I didn't want to make it like a scream. I wanted to put away negative energy; there is so much of it in the world. I am showing a very positive, hopeful, optimistic outlook."

Snisarenko prefaces her story of hope with a terrifying account of waking up to news of the war starting, which she heard from her fiancé in Los Angeles, while it was still eerily calm in her parents' village. That was soon shattered by "Russians coming to take Kyiv", she says. Her father, a policeman, left immediately to serve as a helicopter pilot. She sheltered in the basement for a month with her mother and brother as Russian tank fire rattled the village and soldiers broke into their home. Her mother, holding the family cat, even dared to confront the soldiers.

"People who tried to get out were shot," she says. "I knew we couldn't get out." She made rare and risky trips to the attic for cellular reception, and an art-world friend managed to connect her with Robert Brovdi, a businessman and now military commander who, before the war, created a foundation to support young artists.

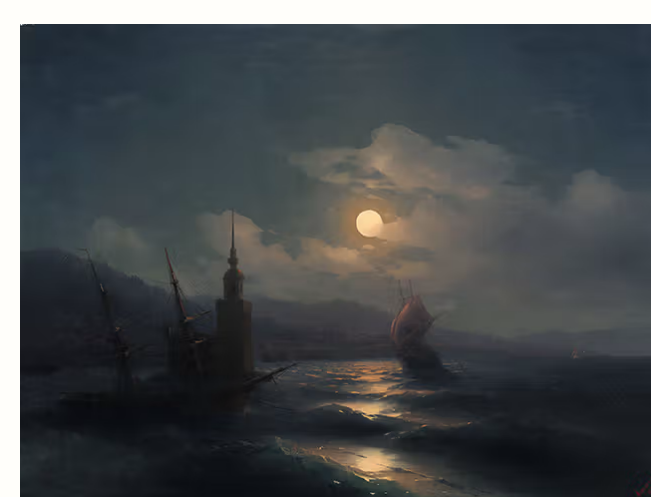
The oldest of the four artists in *Shadows of Us* was born in 1991—the year the Soviet Union collapsed, leading to Ukraine's independence. But "generational traumas affected the younger generation", says Snisarenko. The drip paintings of Zhdanova, who is from Kirovograd in central Ukraine and now lives in Kyiv, addressed death even before the war; now, as the war continues and as an expectant mother, she is "very interested in the philosophy of death and what will happen to all of us", Snisarenko says.

While the artists in the show are inevitably "telling stories of war", they are "from a very optimistic perspective", says Snisarenko, who is exploring the possibility of launching an artists' residency. "How do you create beautiful art in horrifying conditions? Stories like that motivate and inspire people."

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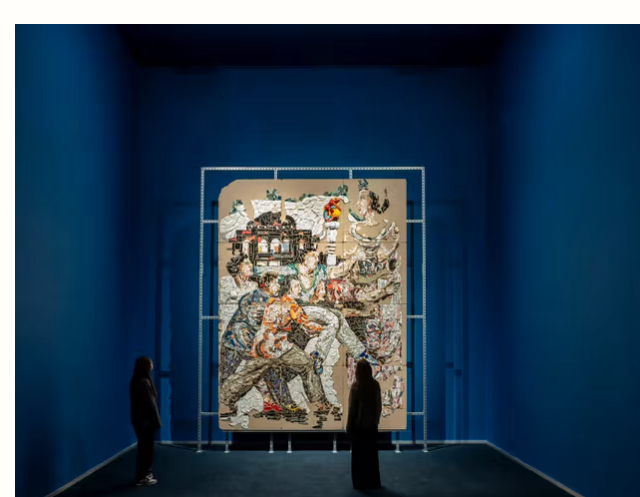


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Gareth Harris

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