

*Where has that life gone, and what has become of all that awful torment and torture?
Will it really be that no one will answer for everything that happened; that it will all be forgotten
without any words to commemorate it; that the grass will grow over it?*

– Vasily Grossman

It wasn't long after sitting down with artist Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak that these words were dictated from an enormous archive of gathered texts and images. As she read aloud, I heard the voice of an entire people: generations and ethnicities; citizens deemed dissidents; subjects to the toppled, yet lingering aura of the Soviet Union.

One could extrapolate many things from Lydia's work, but the most pertinent for me is the importance of discourse. Though you might not know it from afar, many of her paintings begin as extensive collages consisting primarily of articles, headlines, and photographs clipped out from various newspapers. Arranged in a sort of self-perpetuating dialogue, these excerpts usually center on a specific theme – more prominently the current political climate in Ukraine. It takes anywhere from several weeks to many months to gather and arrange the clippings. It may be even longer before she begins to paint over them – more or less obscuring the collage in its entirety.

Visually, her work is akin to a fascinating hide-and-seek that oscillates between found text and rendered imagery... Her collaged paintings investigate the written word, as well as the general nature of disseminated information. To what extent does diction broadcast hidden agendas? Conversely, what happens when rhetoric fails to conceal truth? Who decides what is circulated as opposed to what is suppressed? It is with these questions in mind that Lydia's work challenges the viewer to assess what is actually revealed in the dubious guise of context.

Written by Jake Eshelman