

Title: *Ukraine, how does your garden grow? (Garden)*

Medium: Collage, ceramics, and other media on board

Size: 30 x 40 inches

Work location: Chicago, Illinois

Date of work: 2023

Abstract

Since the Russian invasion in 2022, the war has littered Ukraine's fields with rusting, mangled remnants of Russian military equipment. Still, robust farming continues. Just like farming is *work* to be done by Ukrainians, so is expelling Russia's war to the periphery and beyond. *Garden* recognizes the spirit and meaning of that work.

The idea for *Garden* developed from two encounters with media from Ukraine. First, seeking news and reassurance in the early days of the full-scale invasion, beginning on February 24, 2022, I listened to President Zelenskyy's nightly addresses to the people of Ukraine. In his address on the sixteenth day of the war, he connected the themes of resistance and resilience to farming. When asked if Ukrainians should plant crops in the coming months, especially on the occupied territories:

My answer is very simple: all over our land, no matter what, we have to organize a full-fledged sowing campaign this spring [just like any spring]... as much as possible... It's about our life. About our dreams. About our future. And therefore, about our victory. ... everyone must be like a full-fledged army. Do everything we can in our place to get the result we all deserve... Be sure to hold on. (Zelenskyy, 2022)

Garden also drew on a war-time photograph of a vegetable patch — one in which cabbages are plainly visible and flanked by Russian tank fragments (Sinitsa, 2022). The

photograph was taken in July 2022, in the Kyiv region, where as a child I visited my grandparents for weeks at a time in a small rural town whose quiet life was ordered by the seasonal rhythms of private and government-run farming. To me, the scene in the photograph was immediately recognizable and also absurd because of the proximity of irreconcilable objects; cabbage became an effective visual shorthand for farming in a collage aiming to capture the ideas of resistance and resilience. Cabbage is widely grown and is a key ingredient of borscht, a dish that “almost every Ukrainian would call... the culinary symbol of Ukraine”; borscht is also recorded by UNESCO as representing Ukraine’s intangible heritage (Hruzdieva et al., 2024, p. 2).¹

The collage foregrounds an intact Ukrainian home (a handmade ceramic relief) and surrounds it with overlapping images on paper of varied thickness, producing a slight three-dimensional effect. Some images call attention to war defenses: the Ukrainian armored vehicles, the shapes and colors in the collage background that mirror the vehicles’ camouflage. Other images intimate peacetime: the cabbage images, some cut in the shape of houses; the bright flowers, repeated as live plants and as stylized patterns on women’s traditional headwear still worn today; and the historic embroidery patterns. For me, the embroidery patterns evoke Ukraine’s deep material culture and the current resurgence of traditional crafts in both daily wear and high fashion. The structure of *Garden* is balanced, and the mood is altogether calm, as underscored by an old verse handwritten in Ukrainian on the embroidery segments:

¹ For more on cabbage symbolism, in the context of contemporary Ukrainian theater, see Korneliuk and Moskvitina (2021).

When there is harmony in the family,
Peace and quiet are there,
These people are happy
And this land is blessed.

Attributed to eighteenth century poet and philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda, this verse has been translated into many examples of craft and folklore (Brovarets, 2022). Like my other creative works (e.g., Marshall, 2017), *Garden* synthesizes historical references with contemporary visual language and events.

Keywords: Art, Ukraine, war, resistance, resilience, work, visual language

References

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