



## ODE TO A BUTTERFLY

*A Group Exhibition Celebrating the Life of Solomea Krushelytska*

**Ukrainian Institute of America**

November 18, 2022 – February 19, 2023

**A**rt has the power to educate, illuminate, inspire, interpret, motivate and transform. Here, the verb “transform” is defined as a thorough or dramatic change in form, appearance, or character with synonyms such as alter, change, convert, metamorphose, transfigure, and transmute. This definition and message truly lies at the heart of this exhibition, as artists convert, transfigure, and mutate artistic materials and ideas into new and enlightening realities in reconsidering the “essence” of a proposed central theme.

*Ode to a Butterfly* is a conscious response to a considerable loss of cultural heritage and the destruction of cultural artifacts in Ukraine. Equally, it is a strong counterargument to the attempt of misrepresentation of Ukrainian culture that is limited to rural ethnic aesthetics and the localization of creative practitioners. It is a celebratory poem in praise of the spiritual and physical existence and survival of a distinct and vibrant living culture embodied in the image of the opera star Solomea Krushelnytska, with the leitmotiv of a deep Ukrainian identity. In contrast to *Madama Butterfly*'s character Chio Chio San, Solomea met all of life's challenges presented her with iconic strength and dignity combined with the external brightness of a butterfly.

This exhibition searches for the elusive weightless butterfly by bringing together 20 selected artists working in a wide range of media — painting, sculpture, photography, assemblage, collage, and fiber — who are each unique in style yet collectively bold in the quest to reimagine notions of the muse, reinventing popular motifs and metaphors, among them portraiture, nature, music, and still-life. A number of artists form literal connections to Solomea Krushelnytska's image, while others connect their unique pasts with their cultural experiences of the present to create works that are rich in archetypal and spiritual storytelling.

Subject to this exploration, polystylistic artistic approaches to understanding identity run the risk of reaching an almost surgical preparation of celebrity image or persona — a desire to separate the public mask from private life and the inner world. In this manner, artists seek symbols for creating narrative, which is more archiving than contemporizing of Solomea's image. Consequently, and from slivers of such dissection — as from the beads of Solomea's necklace and the stitchings of Ukrainian embroidery — a new image of a butterfly emerges, freely crossing the boundaries of our prepossessed notions of the diva.

One of the challenges of group exhibitions is setting a substantial and formal bracket in which the multiple positions displayed can take place without losing their integrity. Each work of transformative art in *Ode to a Butterfly* bears witness to both the process and end product of the thematic goal achieved — on an individual level, and on a group level as felt through our perspectives. These works demonstrate the unparalleled breadth and diversity that the practice of multi-media artmaking guarantees, but also the ability to deal with and respond to both contemporary as well as timeless questions of deliberate and creative voice.

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November 2022