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'Before and After': An Artist Repaints Scenes of Her Ukrainian Childhood

"Every day I think: What will be left of these places?"

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Artist Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi grew up in Kyiv before moving to Israel with her family at age 14 in 1991. Except for a brief visit in 1996, she didn't start to visit her homeland until 2014. A few years later when she was pregnant with her daughter, she began to paint what she remembered of her Soviet childhood. These paintings became her "Soviet Childhood" project, done in a style that New York Times art critic Roberta Smith called "an unlikely hybrid of Social Realism and early Modernist figuration, spiked with cartooning, manga comics and children's book illustrations." This was one of the rave reviews from what Smith called "her knockout American debut exhibition" a downtown Manhattan art gallery in 2019. Cherkassky-Nnadi visited her family in Ukraine a mere four months before the war began. As she told a reporter for the Israeli publication, The Forward, "I told everybody I don't believe that Russian tanks will actually enter Kyiv," she said. "But when they started bombing Kyiv, there was no place left for fantasy." Once the war began, Cherkassky-Nnadi worked feverishly to secure her sister, nieces and their children passage to Israel from Ukraine. Now she is working on "Before and After" — the childhood she remembers so fondly and the reality of her homeland today. Cherkassky-Nnadi is selling her works around the world and sending the proceeds to aid Ukrainians in need.



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