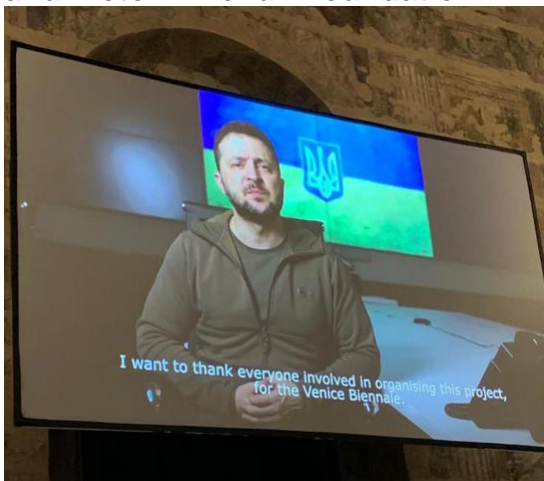


Harris, Gareth and José da Silva. "Support this fight with your art': Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky addresses Venice Biennale artists and visitors." *The Art Newspaper*, April 21, 2022.



THE ART NEWSPAPER

The president and his wife addressed attendees gathered at an exhibition of Ukrainian and international artists co-organised by the PinchukArtCentre and Victor Pinchuk Foundation



Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky speaks to Venice Biennale visitors

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine told an audience in Venice Thursday evening to "support this fight with your art" in the wake of the Russian invasion on 24 February. Zelensky's rousing speech was streamed to a packed room at the opening of the exhibition [*This is Ukraine: Defending Freedom*](#) (23 April-7 August), presented at the Scuola Grande della Misericordia by the PinchukArtCentre and Victor Pinchuk Foundation in partnership with the Office of the President of Ukraine and Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine.

"I am sure the exhibition will allow people to feel what it means for Ukraine to defend freedom," Zelensky said. "Thank you for your attention to our artists." President Zelensky's wife, first lady Olena Zelenska, also sent a message for the exhibition opening, which was read by Yaroslav Melnyk, the Ukrainian ambassador to Italy. "Every painting is under threat: art is mortal, like everyone else," Zelenska said, ending her address with the statement: "We in Ukraine live with the hope. So let there be art! And Ukraine will definitely win!"



A message from Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelenska, was also shared at the event

Billionaire collector Victor Pinchuk, whose eponymous foundation is behind the project in Venice, trained as an engineer in the Soviet era, gaining a PhD from the Metallurgical Institute in Dnipro in eastern Ukraine before setting up his own company in 1990 to manufacture a new kind of metal tubing he had invented. He told *The Art Newspaper* that he was part of a “brainstorming” exercise to select the artists for the exhibition. He added that he plans to “show a victory exhibition” in the future at his art centre in Kyiv. In a speech, he said there had been “genocide against the Ukrainian people”.

This is Ukraine: Defending Freedom brings together a collection of works responding to the Russian war in Ukraine by Ukrainian artists as well as some of the art world's biggest names like Damien Hirst, Takashi Murakami and Marina Abramović. Among the highlights are two colourful gouaches by the late Ukrainian folk artist Maria Prymachenko (1909-97), whose name hit the headlines in February when a museum housing her works [was destroyed](#) during the early days of Russia's invasion. (One of her works was also [added at the last minute](#) to the Venice Biennale's central exhibition, *The Milk of Dreams*.)



Lesia Khomenko, from Max in the army series (2022). Acrylic on canvas. Created during a residency at the Ujazdowski Castle (Warsaw) and Asortymentna Kimmata (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine).

SEANKELLY

Elsewhere, the poignant diary entries of the photographer Yevgenia Belorusets lay out the realities of war for the residents of Kyiv, with harrowing descriptions of the shooting of women and children (and even animals at the zoo) interspersed with day-to-day activities, like cleaning her apartment or listening to musicians play in the street.

Lesia Khomenko's majestic paintings of volunteer soldiers serving alongside her husband bring home the reach of the war, as civilians—in this case an IT engineer, chemist, lawyer and artist—take up arms to defend their country. Upstairs is a collection of works by international artists including pieces by Murakami and Hirst in the colours of the Ukrainian flag, and a giant image of a young refugee girl that the street artist [JR unfurled in Lviv](#) so that it could be seen from the air.



Works by Takashi Murakami and Damien Hirst in [This is Ukraine: Defending Freedom](#) at the Scuola Grande della Misericordia

[This is Ukraine: Defending Freedom](#), 23 April-7 August, Scuola Grande della Misericordia, Venice.

UPDATE: This article was amended to include the correct name of the Ambassador of Ukraine to Italy.