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Tatyana Ostapenko
Portland State University

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On the Cover: “Embrace”

Tatyana Ostapenko

How do you go home again when ‘home’ only exists as childhood memories?

Tatyana Ostapenko grew up within the limited choices that defined life in the former Soviet Union. The Communist Party considered artistic endeavors as subversive if they did not support the party ideology. Artistic instruction was rigid and formal, and non-ideological creative efforts of personal expression were discouraged.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union created economic and societal chaos with no hope of immediate change. From this background of structured artistic rigidity and social upheaval, Tatyana Ostapenko immigrated to the U.S. at the age of eighteen into a fast paced land of multiplicity of choices.

In Atlanta, Tatyana completed her undergraduate studies at Georgia State University, graduating Suma Cum Laude with a B.A. in Spanish and International Business. Afterward, she discovered digital photography as a new tool for creative expression. Through this new medium she had the freedom to capture and explore a developing aesthetic; the mundane and the unsung, the fleeting and seemingly insignificant moments of daily life, and the chance encounter piqued her interest.

In addition to photography, Tatyana recently returned to her childhood love of drawing, now no longer under the restrictive pall of the stifling academism of her upbringing. One influential instructor, with a suggestion here, an idea there, showed her ways of drawing to which she had never been exposed. Her newfound confidence and the removal of restrictive technical demands empowered Tatyana to

tackle mediums. Pencil, charcoal, and pastels became stepping-stones to confront her biggest and most longed for challenge: paint.

Tatyana's oeuvre is without pretense of manipulation toward any ideology, a specific emotional reaction, or association with any contemporary movement. She may even admit it's reactionary. Just as she rejects the rigid constraints of the Social Realist art of her childhood or common ideas of what is beautiful or interesting, she rebels against any notion that contemporary artist must express an objective, collective experience

One senses in her work a desire, perhaps even a passionate struggle to reconcile the two opposing worlds of her experience. Straddling the divide between East and West, belonging and alienation, figuration and abstraction intimately meld and violently collide. The mundane objects, places, and scenes of ordinary life that we overlook in our steroid-paced world are worthy of pause, exploration, and yes, beauty through their imperfections.

A camera is just a tool, but one she uses to capture, explore and make sense of her subjective, personal experience.

Tatyana Ostapenko is currently pursuing a second bachelor degree in Art Practices at Portland State University. Her work can be seen at tatyanaostapenko.com.