

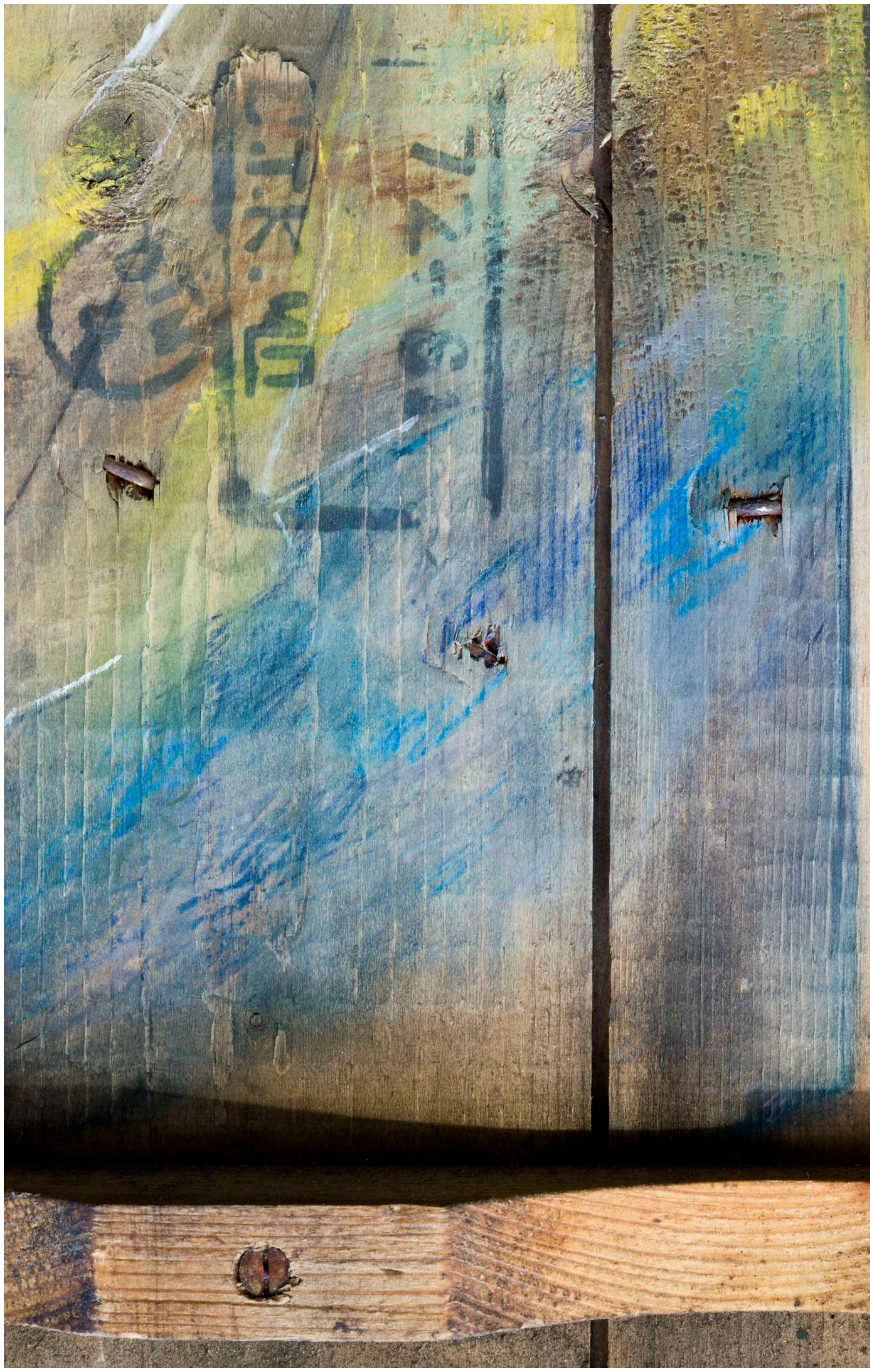
Sonya Atlantova  
Oleksandr Klymenko

# ILOVAYSK DEISIS

A SERIES OF WORKS WITHIN THE "ICONS ON AMMO BOXES" PROJECT









These icons are like coins: they have two sides. Not literally two sides painted, as some icons have, but two aspects that make them unique. First, they are beautiful pieces of art painted by a talented couple of Olexandr Klymenko and Sofia Atlantova. Stylistically, they blend modern motifs and traditional patterns that go back to Byzantine masters. The second important aspect of this collection is its story. Or better to say, many stories that comprise a single narrative of war and peace, human sufferings and hope. The icons have been painted on wooden planks from ammo boxes. Those boxes were used for artillery charges in the eastern front, where Ukraine is at war with Russia-backed separatist groups. The icons painted on those boxes thus try to bring hope for peace and justice to the tormented East of the country. This is not the only story that the icons can tell. Sales from them go to the Pirogov First Volunteer Mobile Hospital (PFVMH). This is a non-governmental project, which brings doctors to the eastern frontline.

There, they help wounded and ill: both the Ukrainian soldiers and civil locals. The icons on ammo boxes, thus, demonstrate how violence and pain can be transfigured to peace and relief, and actually contribute to this transfiguration through the work of doctors.

Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun

Prof. at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles

Act. Director of Huffington Ecumenical Institute

# ILOVAYSK DEISIS

by SONYA ATLANTOVA & OLEKSANDR KLYMENKO

The ILOVAYSK DEISIS series, which comprises 13 monumental works, is a part of the Icons on Ammo Boxes art project, grandiose by its scale and the nobility of its conception.

The Battle of Ilovaysk is known to be the most tragic landmark in the history of the Russian-Ukrainian war over Donbas, resulting in hundreds of killed, wounded and captive Ukrainians. Ilovaysk Deisis by two talented Kyivan artists, alumni of the National Academy of Art and Architecture, Sonya Atlantova and Oleksandr Klymenko is one of the first attempts to address this dramatic theme. They did not try to reproduce it directly, through battle or portrait painting, but did it rather indirectly, using a set of symbols and images of the liturgical Eastern Christian art, the church decoration art in particular. The reason is that *Deisis* or *Deësis*<sup>1</sup> is the central composition on iconostases in churches, on which saints pray for humankind to Christ Pantocrator.

Ilovaysk Deisis is a modern interpretation of this iconographic composition, which maximally accents its eschatological<sup>2</sup> aspects. The end of history in this case is tied to the tragic developments in August 2014, so the saints are praying, first and foremost, for the Ukrainian servicemen killed near Ilovaysk. The New Testament's "harvest" is combined with the "harvest of war"—a classical image in secular literature and art. Of course, the project does not depict the process of "eschatological harvest" but rather its culmination, apotheosis, procession on the brink of eternity.

The main idea of the *Icons on Ammo Boxes* project is the transformation of death into life, an ammo box being a symbol of death, and the icon painted on its boards symbolizing life and resurrection. What is important, this transformation of death into life takes place not only symbolically but also in reality. Conceived in the format of a conceptual art exhibition, the project almost immediately turned into a volunteer one: receipts from the sale of works went to save and heal the wounded in the ATO zone. Thus, the art project, postmodern at the first glance, was filled with the deep contents of Ukraine's present real war being, which is sensed as a national grief.

In *Ilovaysk Deisis*, which is related to the resurrection theme, the transformation of death into life has got a new tint that gives hope and superimposes a bright tune on the otherwise dramatic series of works.

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1 From Greek δέησις, which means "prayer" or "supplication."

2 Eschatology is the branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind (from two Greek words meaning "last" (ἔσχατος) and "study" (-λογία)).

The symbolic inscription of the names of Ukrainian warriors killed in the Battle of Ilovaysk, made by the artists during a performance presentation of the series, must show, according to the authors, the everlasting remembrance — not only about the tragic events on Aug. 14, but also about each of those fallen, whose name becomes almost as valuable as the name of the saint on the icon. Of course, common people do not rank with the most respected Christian saints but rise to their height: the warriors who died in that battle may well found themselves in the “Bosom of Abraham,” at least the life and death of some of them prove so.

According to the artists' intention, the traditional European humanitarian values are embodied in the project through the prism of the Eastern Christian liturgical/artistic tradition, whereas the totalitarian collectivism of the Soviet past and Putin's present is antithesized by personality-based humanism, which appears to be sanctified.

One of an icon's established functions is witnessing. However, if a traditional ancient icon witnesses the Incarnation, these unique new authorial icons, created on boxes of weaponry, are rather like witnesses of the terrible war that is still going on in Eastern Ukraine. Brought from battlefields, the boards of heavy artillery shell boxes, on which the Ilovaysk series icons are painted, help — by their size and silent presence in the ATO — ponder over the scale of this war, feel it and experience it. For many these wooden fragments are more telling an evidence than stories told by people, sometimes subjective and incomplete.

Virtually experiencing a war is a malady of our time. Recall the famous essays by Jean Baudrillard “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place,” in which the author first thought over this problem, although his thoughts concerned television, not the Internet.

The real presence of the utilitarian ammo boxes' fragments, even artistically processed, is, according to the artists, a kind of antithesis to the virtual war, an attempt to take viewers (both in Ukraine and in Europe) out of the simulated space of a network “sofa” war — comfortably followed in warmth and with a cup of fragrant coffee before a monitor — into the world of real combat activities full of horror. It is just with this goal in mind that the artists have performed *Ilovaysk Deisis* on the boards of brutal wooden boxes, brought from the ATO, in the womb of which there hid shells that carried death and devastation to our servicemen.

The problem of gap between the front and the rear is extremely painful in present Ukraine. Warriors, thrown into the inferno of war, feel being unneeded in the rear and alien, redundant in the world of cafés and restaurants. In this project, we see an attempt of the artists at least to reduce, if not liquidate, this gap and eliminate the border between the rear and the front. It is so because soldiers from the front, according to Sonya Atlantova and Oleksandr Klymenko, are full-fledged participants in the project — its coauthors and co-creators, since just the soldiers found these boards under hostile fire and brought them to the rear.

One more function of an icon is to build a dialogue between Orthodox worshippers and God, a person and a saint, and be a kind of facilitator in this dialogue. In the context of this project, an icon as a symbol not only emphasizes the dialogic character of Ukrainian society (unlike the monologic character in Russia) but also carries over this principle to the level of one of the fundamental laws of the being: saints do not just pray but maintain a dialogue with Christ, discussing the humankind's fate. The performance, attended by the unrivaled Ukrainian kobzar, banduryst and lirnyk, Taras Kompanichenko, which is the central event of the presentation and an important element of the project, seems to turn

us even more into both participants and witnesses of the dialogue, transforming its liturgical character into a secular format.

The clothes of the saints on the Ilovaysk series' icons, drawn with colored pencils, do not contrast with their faces, painted with tempera. Such a technique allows the artists — without a deliberate conflict with the canon — to overcome the cold academism inherent in a significant number of modern icons, while not losing the first-impression emotionality: the childish inartificiality and the sincerity of pencil drawing stress the purity, Byzantine noninvolvement and timelessness in the faces of the saints.

The camouflage-styled clothes of the saints are not of course camouflage in its direct sense but are just associated with military outfit and symbolize the saints' approximation to people's needs. The membrane between our and the other worlds gets erased, the sky comes closer to the earth, and the saints standing before Christ turn out to be among those who saw the very bottom of the Ilovaysk inferno and can evidence about it.

Antinomicity — compatibility of the incompatible — is an important feature of the *Ilovaysk Deisis* series of icons (as well as of the entire project). Death and life, weapons and icon, modern war attributes and old traditional Christian art, front and peaceful life... This paradoxical contradiction of the mutually exclusive things is perceived as surprising but natural at the same time.

The *Ilovaysk Deisis* series is not a primarily religious project. In our case, the traditional Christian art language is taken out of the space of a temple or a museum exposition and introduced into the specific space of secular art, to a certain extent continuing the tradition of the renowned *Boychukist* painters, who were executed or died in Stalin's prisons. The classical icon-painting language, which is traditional for Ukrainian art, proves to be comprehensible for all members of Ukrainian society today as well. It seems to be especially relevant during the war, because by its brightly eloquent artistic means it calls for reconciliation and understanding.

Finally, icon-painting remains one of effective systems for expressing thoughts and feelings in the modern conceptual art. That is why the *Icons on Ammo Boxes* has deserved its success and won permanent attention of the Ukrainian media.

Zoya Chehusova  
Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine winner  
Honored Art Worker of Ukraine  
Scientific Worker of the Fine, Decorative and Applied Art Section  
of the Rylsky Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology  
President of the Ukrainian Section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA)





**THE SAVIOR ON THE TRONE.** Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 103 × 48 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.













АНА СЕРГІЯ  
ДЕНИСА  
МАНА  
ВІКТОРА  
ГОРЯ  
ЛЕКСІЯ  
ЛЮДМИЛА  
АНДРІЯ  
СЕРГІЯ  
УСЛАНА  
РІЯ  
РІЯ  
СЕРГІЯ  
ГОРЯ  
АНДРІЯ  
ВІКТОРА  
АЛЕКСАНДР  
ОГДАНА  
АЛЕКСИМА  
АНДРІЯ  
ВАЛЕНТИНА  
ВАДИМА  
АЛЕКСІЯ

ВАСИЛ





**JOHN THE BAPTIST.** Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 118 × 36 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.





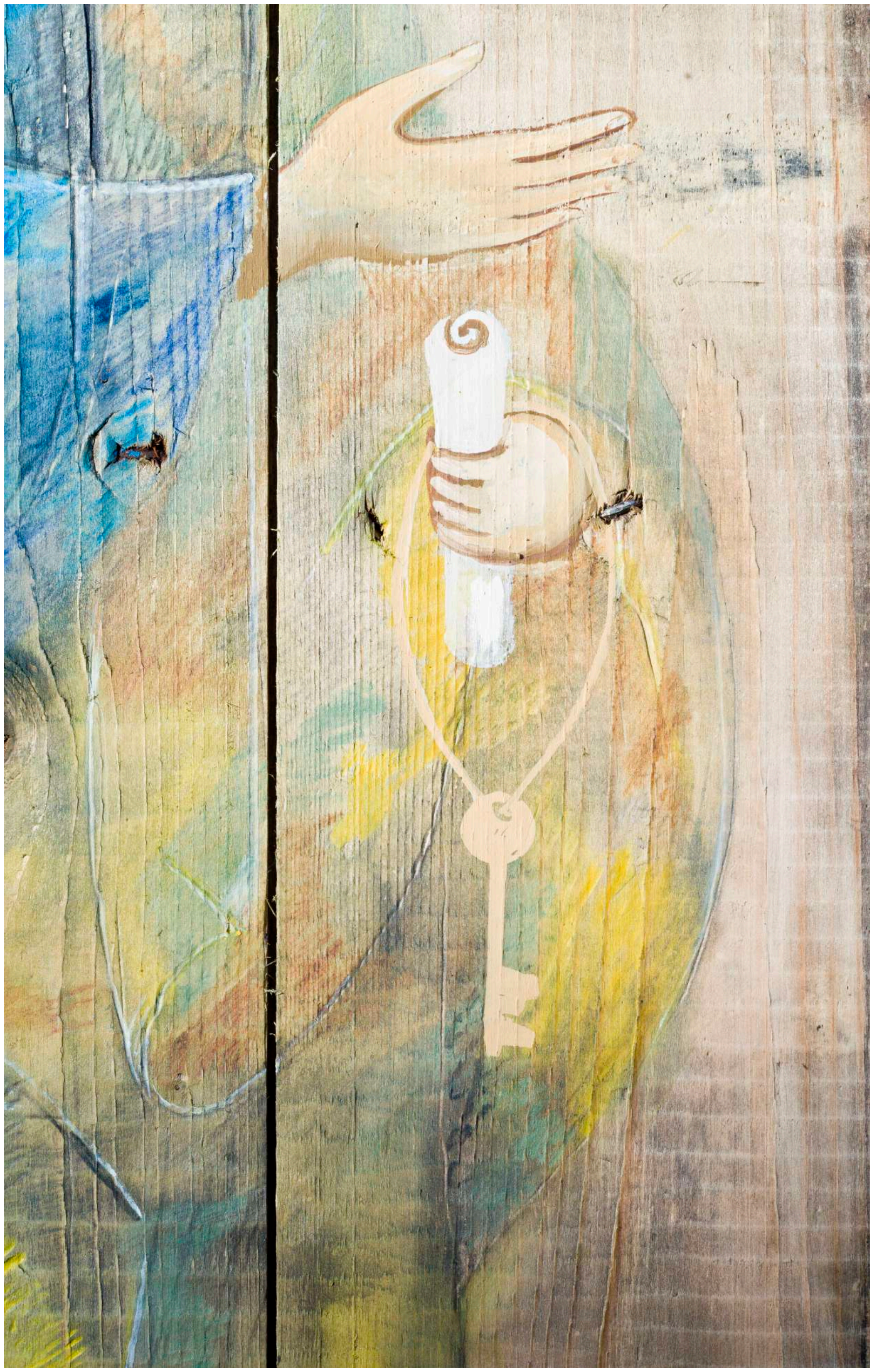
ARCHANGEL MICHAEL. Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 118 × 39 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.





**ARCHANGEL GABRIEL.** Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 118 × 39 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.

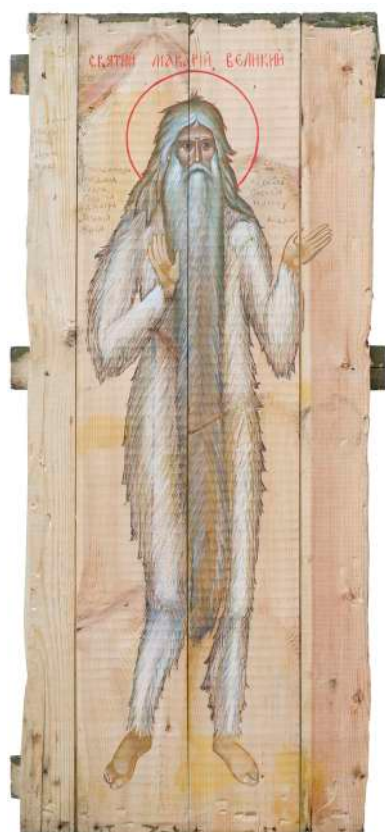


















Юр'я Андрія Станіслава

Дмитра Олександра

Василя Володимира

Олега Романа

Максима Павла

В'ячеслава Олександра

Віталія Дмитра

Михайла Юрія

Дениса Василя

Олександра

Віктора Дмитра

Віталія Миколу

Володимира

Андрія

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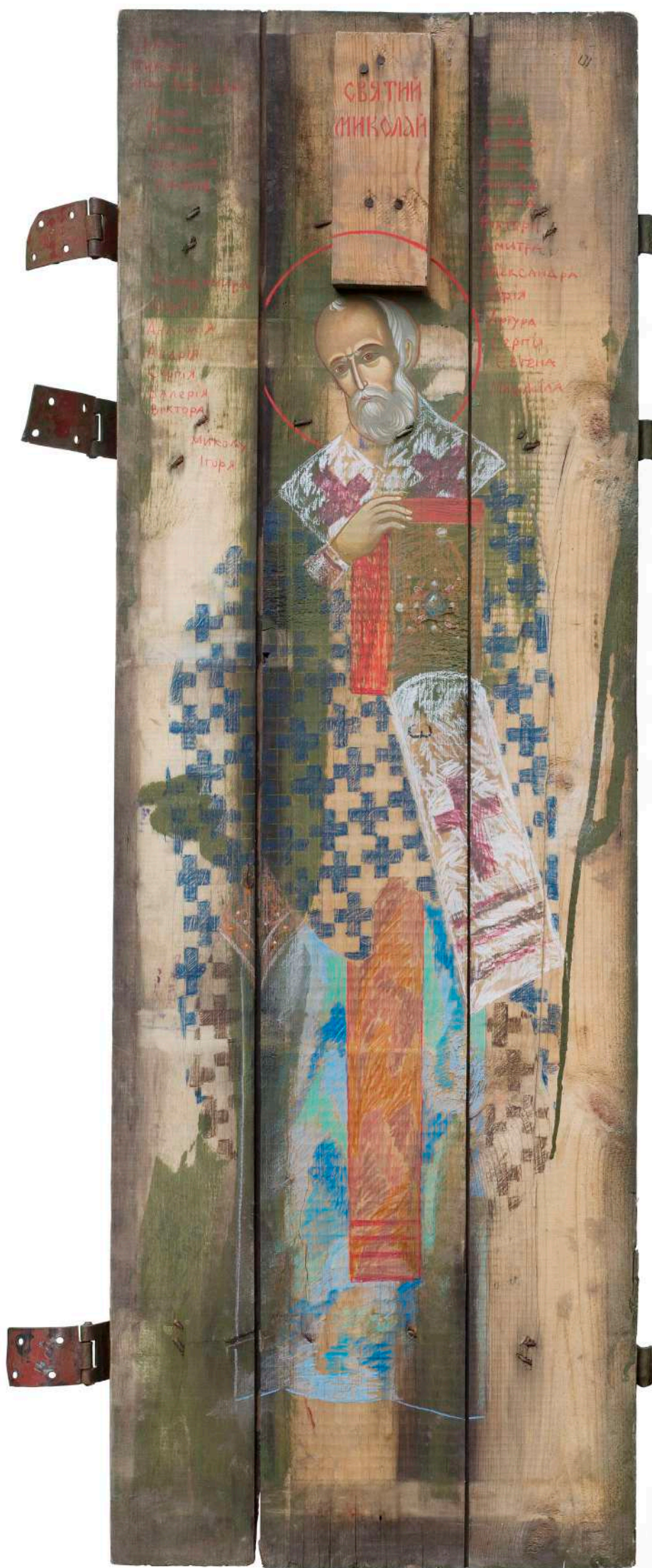
ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE. Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 112 × 39 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.





ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 118 × 39 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.

















**ST. MACARIUS THE GREAT.** Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 103 × 44 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.





ST. MARK THE HERMIT. Fragment of ammo box, tempera, colored pencils, 103 × 48 cm.  
The box was brought from the front by PFVMH staff. Kyiv, 2017.







## THE ART OF VOLUNTEERING AND THE VOLUNTEERING ARTISTS

The war, which lasts in Eastern Ukraine for the fourth year, remains the main challenge for our society. A response to this challenge is the unprecedented self-organization of Ukrainians in volunteer battalions and volunteer movement. Although the absolute majority of the volunteer battalions were converted into regular army units long ago, the phenomenon of volunteership is still here. A symbol of recent years, volunteership is in fact the main “reform that succeeded,” having already altered and continuing to alter Ukraine for the better.

Certainly, artists could not maintain aloofness from the volunteer movement, so they participated in numerous projects and initiatives. Their art has become volunteership and volunteership has turned into an art. The boundary between these two notions has been paradoxically thinning. Volunteership and art have escaped their frameworks: volunteership turns into a performance and now exists not only as a societal or humanitarian category but also as an esthetic and artistic one. At the same time, the art projects' volunteership is not limited to only transferring receipts from sale of artwork for humanitarian projects. Sometimes, it acts as the conceptual core of the art projects, its ideological component, a nucleus from which the rest is growing and evolving. There are occasions when the volunteer expediency replaces the esthetic expediency. Volunteership has infiltrated the actual art, which not only tries to comprehend this phenomenon but also is its important component.

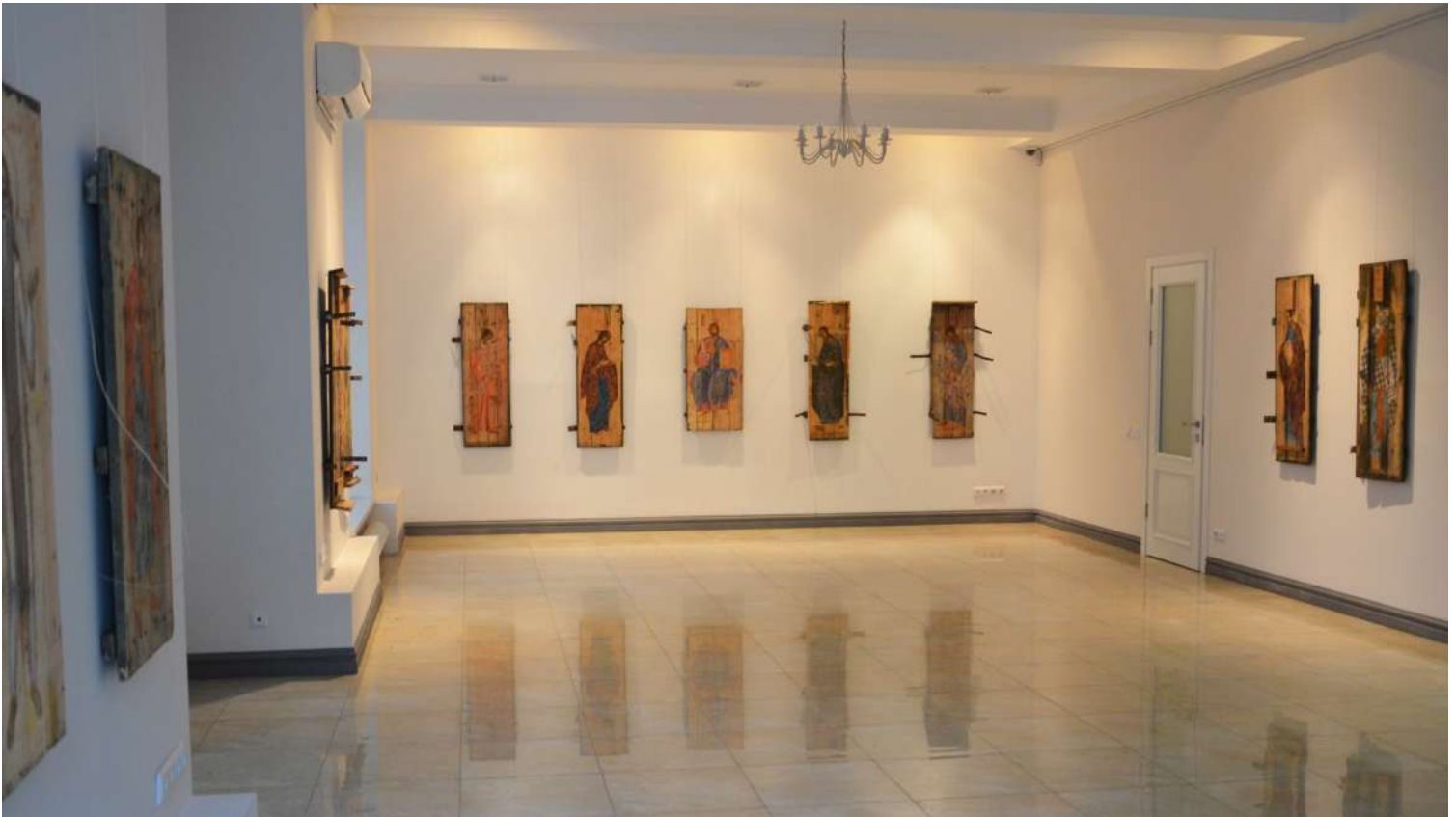
The Pirogov First Volunteer Mobile Hospital, the largest nongovernmental medical project in the Anti-Terrorist Operation zone, is one of the sites where the art that became a volunteer cause finds its new meanings, and where the volunteer activities of doctors involuntarily turn into a real art of healing human bodies and souls — the art that once originated present-day medicine.

It is just the PFVMH, that *Icons on Ammo Boxes*, a conceptual art project that has been one of the best-covered by the media in recent years, is tied up with.

At its first stage, the project was a kind of artistic conceptualization of the hybrid war phenomenon and an attempt to tell about the modern war in terms of traditional art, while being a symbolic antithesis of the war at the same time. Gradually, the accents shifted, and not only the war itself and a war talk became important but so did also the volunteer activities in the context of this war. The art project stepped over its own boundaries and has turned into a cultural initiative with participation of Ukrainian culture figures, including outstanding kobzar, banduryst and lirnyk Taras Kompanichenko. The symbolic victory of life over death — the main idea of the project — has become a reality. For several years have the icons on ammo boxes been saving lives of real people, in flash and blood: soldiers and civilians, women and men, adult and children — all those whom fate has willed to be at the front...

Gennadiy Druzenko  
PFVMH cofounder and leader











PIROGOV FIRST VOLUNTEER MOBILE HOSPITAL

PFVMH is the largest nongovernmental project on involving civil health professionals in provision of medical assistance in the zone of Anti-Terrorist Operation, carried out in certain districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. The project is implemented by the Charitable Foundation “Pirogov First Volunteer Mobile Hospital” in cooperation with the Health Ministry of Ukraine, the Defense Ministry of Ukraine and the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with support from the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine.

The legal foundation for PFVMH operation is a Memorandum of Cooperation dated Feb. 5, 2016, which was signed by the Health Ministry, the Defense Ministry, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the PFVMH Charitable Foundation.

The procedure for PFVMH doctors and auxiliary personnel to enroll in the mobile hospital and work in the ATO zone is guided by Order of the Health Minister of Ukraine No. 1254 of Nov. 18, 2016. This makes the PFVMH presently the only medical project that acts in the ATO zone in full compliance with Ukrainian legislation.

During its operation in the ATO zone, the PFVMH has provided timely and skilled medical care to over 30,000 patients. The hospital has been stationed in 47 locations in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts — in cities and villages as well as in the field.

Eighty-eight of over 400 volunteers of the PFVMH, who worked in the ATO zone in 2014–2017, received a status of participant in combat operations, 26 were marked with state awards, and 96 were decorated with a medal “For Assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine,” and 12 with the Defense Ministry’s “Badge of Honor.”

In the fall of 2015, the PFVMH extended its activities to peaceful regions of Ukraine and performed unprecedented cardio screening in the Khmelnytsky region, which covered 22,433 persons in 565 localities.



Фотографії з архіву ПДМШ





**OLEKSANDR KLYMENKO** (born on July 5, 1976 in Kyiv) is an artist and art critic, a writer (under a pseudonym of Olaf Clemensen) and a member of the Ukrainian Union of Artists. Decorated with a medal “For Assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine” for the Icons on Ammo Boxes art project.

He graduated from the National Academy of Art and Architecture in 1998 and completed a post-graduate course at the Rylskyi Institute of Art History, Folklore and Ethnography in 2002. Worked as a teacher at the Kyiv Boychuk State Institute of Decorative and Applied Arts and Design and at the High Humanitarian and Theological Courses in Kyiv.

Oleksandr Klymenko is the author of the introductory article to the album “Jewel Art of Ukraine” (Kyiv, 2000), a series of articles on art history and a book “The ATO Summer” (Kyiv, 2015).

Oleksandr Klymenko works in the field of monumental and easel arts. He has participated in exhibitions in Ukraine and abroad, and organized a number of literary and art actions and performances.

He is the author of the idea and one of the curators of the Icons on Ammo Boxes project.



**SOFIA ATLANTOVA** (born on Dec. 14, 1981 in Kyiv) is an artist and a writer.

Studied in the Kyiv Shevchenko State Art School and the National Academy of Art and Architecture.

Sofia Atlantova works in the field of monumental and easel art, book illustration and installation art. She is a participant in a number of exhibitions in Ukraine and abroad.



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The Icons on Ammo Boxes project was officially presented on Feb. 24, 2015 in the National Preserve “Sofia of Kyiv.” The event was attended by Sonya Atlantova, Oleksandr Klymenko and Natalia Volobuyeva (left the project in April 2015).

Over two years and a half, exhibitions of the project have been held at the European Parliament (Brussels), Parliaments of Ukraine and Lithuania, St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, National Taras Shevchenko Museum, Lithuanian Embassy in Ukraine and Delegation of EU in Ukraine. The icons were displayed in The Hague, Antwerp, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Hanover, Leipzig, Bonn, Vienna, Warsaw, Lublin, Prague, Rome, Milan, and Catania on Sicily, as well as the Ukrainian cities of Lviv, Lutsk, Mariupol, Dnipro (former Dnipropetrovsk), Kamyanske (former Dniprodzerzhynsk), Pokrovsk (former Krasnoarmysk), and Fastiv. Exhibitions of the icons on ammo boxes were also part of the 25th Economic Forum in Krynica, Poland, and the 8th Kyiv Security Forum. Altogether, the icons have been exhibited at nearly 40 locations in over 20 cities in Ukraine and Europe.

Aiming to draw attention of society to the war in Donbas, the project has raised over UAH 2 million for the PFVMH.

“ILOVAYSK DEISIS” series

EXHIBITIONS

2017

Performance art / presentation of the “Ilovaysk Deisis” series of works in the KalytaArtClub gallery.

Institute of Religious Sciences of St. Thomas Aquinas in Kyiv.

Center of St. Martin de Porres in Fastiv.

Metropolitan Sheptytsky Center at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv.

Publication production team:  
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**Kateryna Svirgunenko**, design and layout  
**Halyna Tkachuk**, copy editor  
**Yevhen Chorny**, photographer (photos of works, presentations and authors)  
**Andriy Marchenko**, photographer (photos of presentations)  
**Olena Naumenko**, photographer (photos of authors)  
**Oleksandr Zheleznyak**, translator  
With assistance from **Hennadiy Druzenko**

