THE OTHER VIEW: SEARCHING FOR PEACE

Paul Osadchuk's stunning collection of photographs implores viewers to reflect on the pain of the past and present while focusing on a future of hope and harmony

by Ayah Victoria McKhail

**SYRIA: Internal strife, civil war**
Paul Osadchuk
photograph, framed, 18.5" x 37.7"

In an unforgettable odyssey that has spanned decades and continents, Paul Osadchuk, a photographer who has visited over 300 world heritage sites, got behind the lens of his camera to take photographs in countries that have been ravaged by war, conflict and division. Currently on display at the Taras Shevchenko Museum is an intriguing exhibition, which features photographs from countries such as **Brazil**, **Canada** and **Syria**, whisking viewers to disparate parts of the world, and leading them to contemplate the past, while reimagining the present and the future.

Curated by Lyudmyla Pogoryelova, Director of the Taras Shevchenko Museum and Olha Turko, Assistant Curator, according to Pogoryelova, the main strength of the exhibition lies in its implicit portrayal of the importance of considering divergent perspectives. "By displaying his photographs in their mirror reflections, the artist aims to show that every conflict has another side, and it's up to both sides of the conflict to see that other side. With these photographs, the artist aims to show that with sensible discussions, the conflict could be prevented or resolved, and destruction and loss of lives avoided."

Osadchuk's exhibition hearkens back to one of the French philosopher, Albert Camus's most famous sayings, "Peace is the only battle worth waging". It also speaks to his own personal stance. "I've been an anti-war advocate for most of my life. It saddens me that people have to resort to such drastic measures to be able to satisfy big business, big egos, or whatever the case may be. It all spins into aggression, destruction and no regard for human life; it deeply saddens me."

Osadchuk's vision for the exhibition emerged from these very sentiments. A teacher by profession, he eventually merged his penchant for travelling with his passion for photography. Born in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1945 to a Ukrainian father and a Belarusian mother (who considered herself more Ukrainian), his Ukrainian roots are an integral part of his identity and have shaped his existence for as long as he can remember, despite immigrating to Canada when he was only three years old.
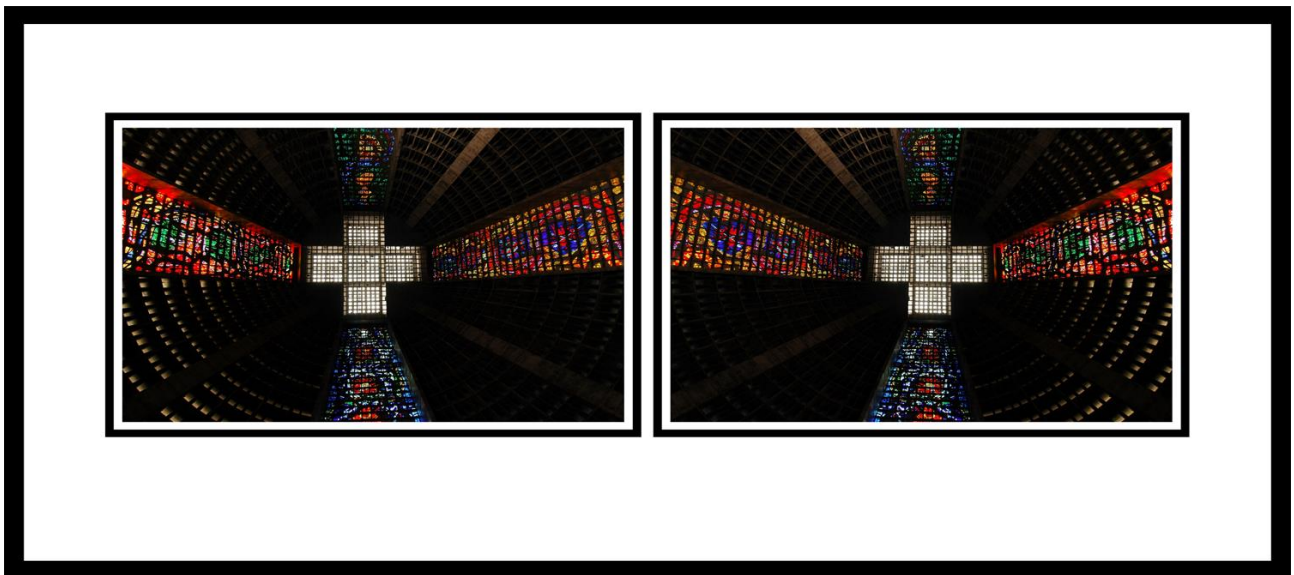
BRAZIL: The Paraguayan War reshaped the boundaries
Paul Osadchuk
photograph, framed, 18.5″ x 37.7″

Osadchuk remains inextricably linked to Ukraine and still has family there. Watching the war unfold has been a deeply distressing experience for him, but rather than being paralyzed by the sense of devastation that has engulfed him, he's been propelled into action and is motivated to make a difference. "The exhibition is focused on fundraising; all profits will assist in the rehabilitation of Ukraine's wounded soldiers and veterans through the Canada-Ukraine Foundation."

UKRAINE: Kyiv returned to its historical name in 1995
Paul Osadchuk
photograph, framed, 22.7" x 31.7"

The opening reception was held on September 22, 2024. It garnered a great deal of interest from the public, who were eager to embark on a journey of discovery through the artist's eyes. Larissa Stavroff, a cultural worker at the Shevchenko Museum and a life-long friend to Paul, delivered the keynote address, which highlighted milestones in a life built on momentous experiences. She also mentioned an important lesson Osadchuk drew from one of his photography professors at Toronto's York University, which is a focal feature in his work. "Following Mike Semak's teaching that there should be purpose and intention in what you're shooting, Paul's intent is to provoke people to think and draw their own conclusions. His wish is to pique their curiosity, and engage them in thought. And it gives him great satisfaction to stand back and observe their response to his images."

Ihor Tomkiw, who's currently reading a comprehensive book, entitled "Ukraine, The Forging of a Nation" by the Lviv-based historian and professor, Yaroslav Hrytsak, found himself drawn to two photographs taken there.

The first one, **Ukraine: Kyiv returned to its historical name in 1995**, is a memorial to Petro Sahaidachny, a political and civic leader, who was a Hetman of Ukrainian Cossacks from 1616-1622. It's located in Khotyn, Chernivtsi Oblast. The second one, **Ukraine: Nomadic, fighting for freedom**, is a memorial to Cossacks and peasants, located in Berestechko, Volyn Oblast. Reflecting on its magnitude, he said, "It's very powerful. The clasping of the hands symbolizes unity and cooperation, which are needed to stand up to oppression".


CAMBODIA: Struggles within South East Asia
Paul Osadchuk
photograph, framed, 23″ x 28.5″

Tetiana Protcheva, an artist, found the photographs**, Cambodia: Struggles within South East Asia** particularly striking. "The contrast between black and white really drew me in. Seeing a strong source of light filter through underscored the importance of seeking out light; of finding a passageway, even during the fog of war when everything's so dark."
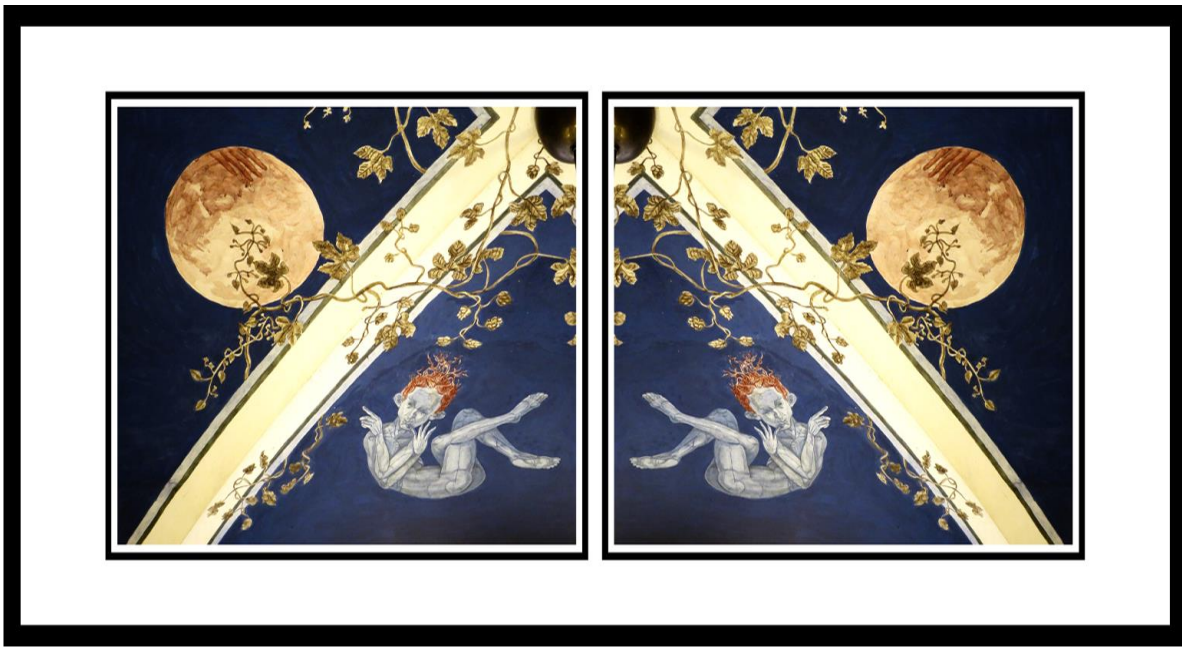
LITHUANIA: Its independence regained in 1991
Paul Osadchuk
photograph, framed, 29″ x 32″

Iris Sopinka, a retired French teacher who volunteers at the museum and is an amateur art collector, found herself mesmerized by **Lithuania: Its independence regained in 1991**. "Taken as a composite whole, these photographs reveal a sense of celestial wonder. The beauty of the dark, night sky, illuminated by the moon, transports you to another orbit. You immediately feel uplifted."

In addition to viewing the stunning collection of photography on display, visitors to the museum were enchanted by a selection of reggae pieces played by Eileen Eryn Rene, a Jamaican-Canadian flautist. "Reggae music is about freedom and peace, so I thought it would complement the themes inherent in Paul Osadchuk's creative vision. I also wanted to honour the profound legacy of Taras Shevchenko. Similarly, Bob Marley was a creative freedom fighter."

Reflecting on the scope of the photographs on display, she added, "It's apparent the artist was intent on bringing forth peace, as he doesn't show turmoil in his pieces. Instead, he refocuses us on the abstract beauty of monuments and landscapes."

These points resonated with Alexandra Radkewycz, who enjoys attending art exhibitions at the museum, particularly because they place a spotlight on both emerg-

ing and established Ukrainian artists. "I love the diversity of the photographs on display. Having two appear alongside one another is emblematic of wholeness; there's an unbrokenness to them. Essentially, they encapsulate the unity of a nation. Being Ukrainian, I think about that every day, and how ultimately, we're all striving toward peace."

''The Other View: Searching for Peace'' photo exhibition can be seen at the Taras Shevchenko Museum until **October 25, 2024**

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All profits will assist in the rehabilitation of Ukraine's wounded soldiers and veterans through the Canada-Ukraine Foundation.

About Ayah Victoria McKhail

Ayah Victoria McKhail is a Toronto-based journalist who is passionate about arts and culture reporting. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, such as the Literary Review of Canada, the *WholeNote*, and newspapers affiliated with the East Coast's SaltWire Network