

ARTS & CULTURE



## YOUNG ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: TATYANA BAKER

*MSA junior searches for light, color wherever she goes*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JULIA V MILLER



For many students at Mississippi School of the Arts, attending the statewide boarding school is their first foray in living away from home. But for one particular student, the journey to Brookhaven began an ocean away in Ukraine.

Tatyana Baker grew up in a culture immersed in art, and creating it was as natural to her as breathing.

“Literally when I just learned how to talk and how to do things, I pretty much [started making art],” she said.

Baker moved to Mississippi in 2019 at 14 years old with her sister. She had always wanted to attend an art school, so her mother began talking to her about MSA here in Brookhaven. At first, Baker was

skeptical about whether she would be accepted to the school since she had never had any formal training. After encouragement from her mother, Baker soon found herself looking forward to the prospect of attending the state’s public high school, and when she was accepted, it was an easy answer to say yes.

Since coming to the state’s public boarding school, her art has blossomed. She began drawing more, and she picked up painting. Within just a few months, she won a silver key in the Scholastic Arts Awards for a self portrait she painted, and it was displayed at the Mississippi Museum of Art earlier this year.

Once Baker learned that her painting would be displayed, she

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe in terms of total area — spanning 603.55 square km (or 233 square miles — twice the size of Italy!)

- Ukraine stands 4th in the world in terms of most educated population. 99.4 percent of Ukrainians aged 15 and over can read and write. 70 percent of adult Ukrainians have a secondary or high education. Even the current heavyweight champions from Ukraine Vitali and Wladimir have doctorate degrees.

- Ukraine is the world’s largest producer of sunflower seeds, and across every part of the Ukraine, you’ll see stunning fields of these yellow blooms (their national flower).



“

*No matter where I am, I was born Ukranian, and that is who I am. I love America so much, but I'm still Ukranian. You can't be American without being who you are.*

Tatyana Baker, MSA Junior



## A COUNTRY AT WAR

On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine after much tension around the globe. For Baker, it has been difficult to watch knowing her family and friends are in danger.

“There’s no words to describe it,” she said.

Baker talks to her best friend in Ukraine every day, and her heart hurts as details of the war are shared with her.

“I was so upset, and I wanted to help,” Baker said. “I didn’t know what to do. I thought about a fundraiser, and I went to Ms. Hirsch with it because I didn’t know what to start with.”

Hirsch found someone who could create small pins that could be sold to raise money for Save the Children — Ukraine Relief that was established in 2014. The Beta Club adopted the fundraiser as a service project, and it has taken off.

“I am very happy they are helping me,” Baker said. “I would have tried to do something by myself, but I am not very public. I don’t know how I would do it without them.”

MSA administration is working to add the pins to their school store, which can be accessed at [msabrookhaven.org](http://msabrookhaven.org). The pins are \$5 each, and they can be picked up at the school or shipped for an additional \$3. The MSA Beta Club is on track to raise \$1000 for Save the Children.

was in a state of disbelief.

“I think sometimes she doesn’t realize her abilities,” MSA Executive Director Suzanne Hirsch said. “She’s very humble, but she’s been able to find that confidence and pride as time goes on.”

The painting represents Baker becoming American while also holding on to her Ukrainian roots.

“No matter where I am, I was born Ukrainian and that is who I am. I love America so much, but I’m still Ukrainian,” she said. “You can’t be American without being who you are.”

The fire represents Russian aggression. The flowers represent Ukrainian culture, and the ribbons are American. The wheat represents the holocaust of the Ukraine in 1932.

“I was trying to put them together and mix it.”

She created it before the Russians invaded Ukraine in February, but the meaning and message of her painting hasn’t changed. Baker explained the war may be new, but oppression by Russia has been going on for a long time. Ukraine has fought for its freedom throughout its history.

“They are strong people; that is what I’m trying to tell people,” she said.

But it’s not just Ukraine’s strength that Baker loves about her homeland.

“The culture is very beautiful,” she said.

In Ukraine as Easter approaches, many people take up pysanky, a style of drawing intricate details in beeswax on eggs. Baker said they are created with a lot of thought because each sign holds meaning.

Art is also incorporated into their traditional clothing called rushnyks. The shirts are cross stitched by hand, and every region has their design. One day, Baker hopes to take the Ukrainian tradition of small intricate designs and incorporate it into her own artwork, but that style can be very time consuming, especially for someone trying to keep up with the demands of art school assignments.

For now, she has one goal in all of her art regardless of the medium. She tries to show as much color as possible.

“For other people, the world is not as bright. They don’t see it as I see, and I show the pictures and colors that I see all around me,” she said.