

Hlafira Shcherbak's
One Can't Catch My
Soul (top) and *People in*
Dark Times (bottom)

by [John Kohan](#) in the [October 2023](#) issue



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The war has touched Hlafia Shcherbak in a more personal way than other artists from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community of icon writers in Lviv, the cultural center of Western Ukraine. When her fiancé died in the Russian siege of Mariupol, she channeled her grief into two paintings that bear witness to a life of faith in extremity.

One Can't Catch My Soul draws inspiration from Christ's words not to fear those "who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). In an abstract landscape after a battle littered with military hardware, a winged being breaks free from confining wire mesh. Shcherbak gives the face of Christ to this soul seeking refuge with Christ.

People in Dark Times recalls the story in the book of Daniel of the three Hebrew youths thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow down before a statue of King Nebuchadnezzar. When the flames do not consume the trio, the Babylonian tyrant sets them free, saying he has seen a fourth figure in the fire like "a son of the gods" (Dan. 3:25).

Christ appears in this second icon as an incandescent face alongside ten others in the inferno of modern Ukraine, sharing their suffering with the promise that "when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned" (Isa. 43:2). Shcherbak hopes her harrowing imagery will "confront the darkness of our times and be a source of light for others."