

Brendan Hoffman

“Brotherland: War in Ukraine”

East Gallery – Blanden Art Museum

May 22 – Aug 7, 2021

“All war is a symptom of man's failure as a thinking animal.”

John Steinbeck

Since protests in Kyiv drove President Viktor Yanukovich from power in February 2014, eastern Ukraine has been convulsed by a Russian-led insurgency that evolved into a full fledged war centered in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, an industrial region known as Donbas.

I've been photographing the war, and civilian life surrounding it, since its early days in April 2014, one of very few photographers to have continually worked on both sides.

Now, after six years, the war grinds on, stuck in an uneasy stalemate while delivering a steady stream of death and injury. For civilians living near the demarcation line, conflict is like the weather, an uncontrollable condition of the environment with which one must contend daily. Everyone continues their business as best they can with a practiced sense of normalcy, revealing the remarkable human ability to adapt and carry on.

For soldiers, enthusiasm for the cause, whether fueled by propaganda or patriotism, is tempered by the toil and terror of survival.

My portrayal takes a humanistic perspective to consider that the vast majority of people touched by this war, civilians and soldiers alike, on all sides, are victims whose lives have been irreversibly altered by forces beyond their control – forces that, as in all wars, originate with a deliberate choice to kill. My pictures also emphasize the inherent absurdity of armed conflict: the shock of the unimaginable juxtaposed with the utterly mundane.

The difficult truth is that if war can happen in Donbas, it can happen anywhere.

