

*Pietà*, by Khrystyna Yatsyniak

art selection and comment by [John Kohan](#) in the [April 6, 2022](#) issue



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The image of Mary cradling the body of the crucified Jesus known as *Pietà* (“pity” in Italian) is one of the most powerful motifs in sacred art. We all share the pain of a mother who mourns for her son—especially when he is an innocent victim of injustice. Mary’s lament brings maternal love and compassion into the drama of Christ’s death, dominated by men without mercy behaving badly.

In this sadly serene icon, Khrystyna Yatsyniak shows Mary and Jesus in close up, their poignantly stylized features colored a gritty, ashen gray. The grieving mother reaches out to touch her son, so calm in death. It is a gesture of tenderness that

brings to mind iconic images of Christ at his birth, resting cheek to cheek with Mary.

Yatsyniak belongs to a circle of Ukrainian Greek Catholic icon makers from the city of Lviv who create modern variations on this ancient art form. Suppressed during the Communist era, Greek Catholic culture has undergone a renaissance since Ukraine gained its independence in 1991. Look at the sorrowing Virgin of Yatsyniak and you see Ukrainian mothers who now weep for their children and refuse to be comforted, because those children are no more (Jeremiah 31:15).