

Ring Around the Sun & We Rage On AYLA DMYTERKO

13 November 2025 – 10 January 2026

‘When a word appears,’ wrote the French psychoanalyst Anne Dufourmantelle, ‘a world is born with it.’ Dufourmantelle is referring to the word *secret*, which first appeared via Latin in the twelfth century. By designating something hidden, the secret doesn’t just describe the world as it is, but forges something new and powerful within it while at the same time containing the seeds of undoing. The secret is the eye of the storm, a hurricane that can upend everything around it while remaining, at its core, hidden from view. In its earliest iteration the secret referred to the separation of a harvest’s good grain from the bad; from there it extended into other kinds of setting apart: private letters, closed boxes. Later it came to designate parts of the body hidden from public view, and it was this hiddenness, Dufourmantelle wrote, that bestowed on the secret its erotic valency.

These potent and paradoxical aspects of the secret – generative, oblitative and erotic – animate the constellation of works in Ukrainian-Canadian artist Ayla Dmyterko’s *Ring Around the Sun & We Rage On*. Spanning oil painting, sculpture, moving image and a collaboration with a theremin player, the works gesture to folklore and cultural stereotypes of Eastern European and Slavic heritage, from the Old Believer communities to Cold War tropes of the Soviet ‘spygirl’. Taken together, the works propose identity less as something identifiable and cohesive, and more as debris left in the wake of a tornado – a phenomenon that is simultaneously a force of destruction and one that forges a way across a terrain, rearranging everything it touches.

The spiral of the hurricane lends choreography to the exhibition, which is loosely organised as a concentric circle. At the outer fray lies debris, artefacts and ephemera that have been picked up and deposited by the storm. Here are motifs that recur throughout Dmyterko’s work, cultural memories that repeat on the children of those who have emigrated, half-remembered stories and objects. Ceramic hollyhocks symbolise home, their stems woven into tactile and talismanic ribbons and loops. Wooden distaffs – spindles on which women sat in circles to spin wool and gossip – recreate the spatial dynamics of the secret. Here the circle is conceived as both intimate and a protector of the unknowable: the outer face of distaffs were often painted to intimidate and show off one’s skill to those sitting opposite, while the inner face bore a mirror for personal reflection.

In Slavic Old Believer communities, it was understood that the air itself was thick with demons, which were small enough to fit in one's pocket and wild enough to roam the fields outside. The only way to keep oneself free of the demons' grasp was to keep in constant motion – something akin to *the devil makes work for idle hands*. In this sense, to spiral is not just to spin out or lose control, but to perform a tactful dance with risk and change. As well as in the spiralling hurricane of the exhibition's layout, this dance is evoked through the recurrence of ribbons and umbilical-like cords. In the series of paintings *Caim I-VI* (2025), ribbons contort across the canvases, each one linking to the next as if to bind the air between them. The ribbons are the movement and costumes of the dancer, but they are also her spinning gaze as she performs. The paintings are a kind of negative voyeurism, depicting empty theatre stalls in Moscow, New York and Paris – all places where the Bolshoi Ballet performed before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In keeping with Dufourmantelle, who is a key touchstone for Dmyterko's thinking, the ribbons are emblazoned with unreadable phonetic incantations.

Two large-scale paintings, *The Middle Distance* and *Circles of Confusion* (both 2025), also demarcate the tornado's outer space. In *The Middle Distance*, hurricanes appear as sentinels marking the way ahead, ambiguously protective or policing. The painting's format borrows from colonial propaganda posters from the early twentieth century which promoted emigration to Western Canada. These depicted the false promised land of immigrant life: stable income, education and bucolic plenty, typically featuring attractive young women, beneath which lurked the secret of indigenous peoples' displacement. In Dmyterko's painting a figure struggles to gain footing on this supposedly smooth path, echoing the treatment of those who, like Dmyterko's ancestors, did make the move from Eastern Europe to Canada, only to be treated, as recently as the Cold War, as potential 'enemy aliens'.

Similarly, in *Circles of Confusion*, a young woman lies – or has possibly collapsed – at the beginning of the path. She is drawn from Andrew Wyeth's famous painting *Christina's World* (1948), her facial features adapted by Dmyterko to match those of Eastern Orthodox icon paintings. In the distance, ghostly prairie houses rise up into the air, held aloft by the storm. Are we observing a figure setting out from her syncretic cultural origins, or an attempt to make her way back to something lost? The painting's title suggests that it is both at once, suspended in an impossible dance. Blue curtains frame the scene to remind us that what we see is a performance as much as a journey, and that Dmyterko's figure, who gazes back, is all too aware of her bathetic circumstances. Like the 'spygirl' character who recurs throughout the exhibition – incarnated by the artist herself in the video work *SK Eye* (2025) – Dmyterko's female figures play with absurdity and concealment to subvert colonial and Cold War paranoia, transforming these stereotypes into tools of psychic survival.

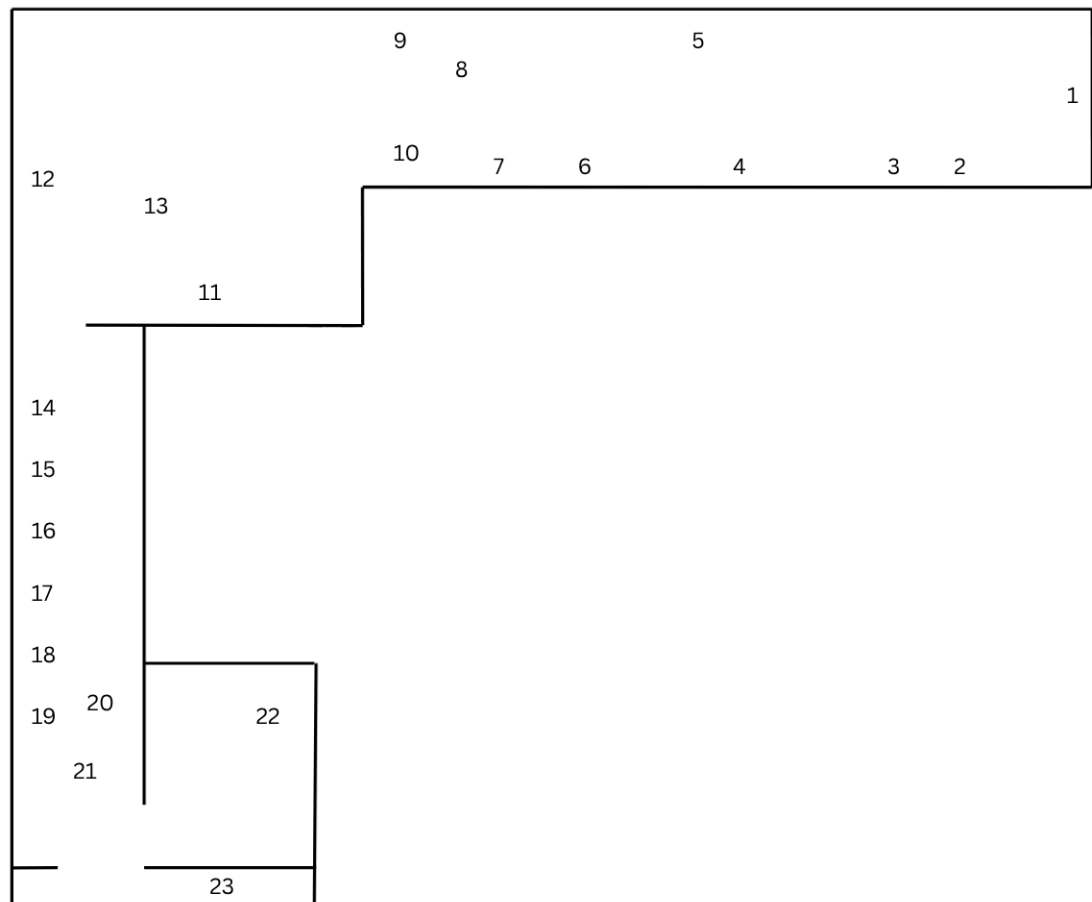
In the eye of the storm there is calm, the domain of secrecy. The gallery's inner room contains a projection of Ukrainian circle dancers. Unlike watching a performance on stage, the viewer finds themselves imbricated in the middle of the dance; they are reminded that movement is ongoing, perhaps even literally – of those forced to immigrate today due to the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. A sound work made in collaboration with a theremin player binds the air of the space; Dmyterko likens this instrument to painting, since both involve forging something from nothing, an attempt to ply the frequencies of the air. Like the static that augurs the onset of a storm, the works in *Ring Around the Sun & We Rage On* are attuned to such frequencies, the secret codes of air, genealogy and memory. They know that the storm will come and will ravage, but they also know that the dance must continue; they cannot afford to keep still.

Words by Daisy Lafarge

Ayla Dmyterko (b. 1988, Saskatchewan, Canada) is a Ukrainian-Canadian artist currently based in Glasgow, Scotland. She received her MFA from the Glasgow School of Art, where Dmyterko was awarded the Graduate Fellowship through the Glasgow Sculpture Studios. She has been in residence at the Banff Centre, Canada, and completed the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, US. Working across painting, sculpture, installation, film, and text, Dmyterko draws from her lived familial experience, generational histories, and ancestral wisdom to revive and disseminate cultural memories related to trauma, including displacement and environmental collapse, while also exploring eco-feminist positions and empowerment.

This exhibition is made possible in part by the generous support of the Canada Council.

Canal Side Entrance



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| <p>1. <i>Secrets fall in the forest</i>
2025
Oil and distemper on linen in found wooden screen
84 x 90 cm
33 x 35 1/2 in</p> | <p>2. <i>Always remember your home II</i>
2025
Stoneware ceramic, glazed
35 x 21 x 8 cm
14 x 8 1/2 x 3 in</p> |
| <p>3. <i>Family Frames</i>
2025
Oil on linen
150 x 110 cm
59 x 43 1/2 in</p> | <p>4. <i>Always remember your home I</i>
2025
Stoneware ceramic, glazed
8 x 23 x 13 cm
3 x 9 x 5 in</p> |

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| <p>5. <i>Always remember your home III</i>
2025
Stoneware ceramic, glazed
35 x 12 x 5 cm
14 x 4 1/2 x 2 in</p> | <p>6. <i>In the darkest nights, remember the sun</i>
2025
Oil on linen with beeswax in found wooden icon frame
44.5 x 31.5 x 9.5 cm
17 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 3 1/2 in</p> |
| <p>7. <i>Money on the fields bakes, but it will not grow</i>
2025
Oil on linen with beeswax in found wooden frame
48.5 x 42.5 x 7.5 cm
19 x 16 1/2 x 3 in</p> | <p>8. <i>Like Fire on Water I</i>
2025
Egg tempera and chalk pastel on carved cherry wood
100.5 x 55 x 25 cm
39 1/2 x 21 1/2 x 10 in</p> |
| <p>9. <i>Always remember your home IV</i>
2025
Stoneware ceramic, glazed
29 x 18 x 10 cm
11 1/2 x 7 x 4 in</p> | <p>10. <i>Always remember your home V</i>
2025
Stoneware ceramic, glazed
28 x 18 x 6 cm
11 x 7 x 2 1/2 in</p> |
| <p>11. <i>The Middle Distance</i>
2025
Oil on linen with beeswax
150 x 110 cm
59 x 43 1/2 in</p> | <p>12. <i>Circles of Confusion</i>
2025
Oil on linen with beeswax
150 x 110 cm
59 x 43 1/2 in</p> |
| <p>13. <i>SK Eye</i>
2025
Single-channel video
14:43 min
Edition of 3 + 1 AP</p> | <p>14–
19. <i>Caim I-VI</i>
2025
Oil and distemper on linen
48 x 41 cm
19 x 16 in</p> |
| <p>20. <i>Edified Eddies</i>
2025
Oil on Linen in cast bronze frame
25 x 20 x 5.5 cm
10 x 8 x 2 in</p> | <p>21. <i>Like Fire on Water II</i>
2025
Egg tempera and chalk pastel on carved cherry wood
85 x 55 x 25 cm
33 1/2 x 21 1/2 x 10 in</p> |
| <p>22. <i>Dance of the Fated Furies</i>
2025
Single-channel video installation
Music by Christina Masha Milinusic
9:49 min
Dimensions variable
Edition of 3 + 1 AP</p> | <p>23. <i>Warped Warnings</i>
2022–2025
Hand-stitched antique textile and poly-propylene mail sac, onions, ceramic hollyhocks</p> |