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The People Have Spoken

Ukrainian Artist Wins Embracing Our Differences People's Choice Award

"Every day I see people who are restoring their cities and their personal lives from the ruins and looking into the future," says artist Alena Grom. "This photograph is about that survival."

By [Staff](#) May 5, 2025



Stolen Spring by Alena Grom of Bucha, Ukraine, won this year's People's Choice award from [Embracing Our Differences](#).

Embracing Our Differences celebrates kindness, respect and inclusion through year-round programming and annual outdoor exhibits at Sarasota's Bayfront Park and St. Petersburg's Poynter Park.

Grom's *Stolen Spring* depicts a woman standing amid the bombed remains of Bucha framed by a vibrant backdrop of cherry blossoms. The contrast between devastation and renewal creates a powerful tension that invites reflection on grief, hope, and resilience.

Grom says that the photo is part of a "historical dialogue" with Polish photographer Michael Nash. After World War II, Nash used decorative backdrops to photograph survivors among the ruins of Warsaw.

“I live in Bucha and work in Irpin,” Grom says. [“After the Russian occupation](#), these cities were destroyed. The military landscape has become my reality and routine. Every day I see people who are restoring their cities, their personal lives from the ruins and looking into the future. This photograph is about that survival.

“A stolen spring is a stolen life,” Grom continues. “Each image tells a personal tragedy, but also a life-affirming story of a survivor—and a hope that Ukraine will rise from the ruins.”

The People’s Choice award is determined by a survey available to the 382,240 visitors who attended this year’s exhibitions, which ran from Jan. 19 through April 13 in Sarasota and March 1–31 in St. Petersburg.

“This year, *Stolen Spring* received an overwhelming number of votes—far surpassing any other work in the exhibition,” says Sarah Wertheimer, president and CEO of Embracing Our Differences.

“Alena’s work is both intimate and universal,” Wertheimer continues. “It reminds us that even in the face of profound destruction, beauty and strength endure. *Stolen Spring* speaks to the power of memory, the persistence of hope, and the dignity of survival—core values that resonate deeply with our mission.”

Grom received a \$2,000 cash award for her work.

“It is especially important to me that *Stolen Spring* resonated so much with the viewers, considering the current situation,” she says. “May this victory become another ray of light, reminding the world about Ukraine’s struggle and the indomitable will of its people.”