



HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN

For Immediate Release

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THE HEART OF WAR

George Widener's Ukraine

March 19–April 24, 2026

New York, NY — February 27, 2026 — George Widener's work occupies a unique place in the art world. A well-known numbers savant, he is celebrated for his ability to craft multi-layered visual narratives that merge mathematical precision with personal storytelling, drawing upon his own vivid memories and fascination with the intricacies of timekeeping systems. His meticulous drawings reflect a deeper, almost obsessive engagement with numbers and their symbolic power, creating artworks that resonate with the complexities of human cognition and experience.

Hirschl & Adler Modern is pleased to present recent works by George Widener (b. 1962) that reflect on his months volunteering in war-ravaged Ukraine. *The Heart of War: George Widener's Ukraine*, on view from March 12 to April 17, 2026, features seven multi-media works on paper completed by the artist after his return to the United States in the fall of 2025. These are partially abstracted reflections of the region's chaos and emotional intensity, interpreted through a combination of symbols, words, and numbers that are central to the artist's practice. It was Widener's sixth volunteer effort in Ukraine since the start of the Russian invasion in 2022. During that time, Widener provided logistical and humanitarian assistance in some of the most sensitive and dangerous places in the war. He bore witness to the aftermath of the massacre in Bucha and delivered supplies to Ukrainian

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soldiers on various fronts in the Donetsk and Donbas regions: the outskirts of the battles of Avdiivka, Zaporizhzhia, and Pokrovsk.

George Widener may be the only professional American artist, who is also a veteran, with significant experience in the many theaters of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. His personal mission is to support local communities and document the ongoing challenges faced by the Ukrainian people. This commitment to both global awareness and the fight for democracy permeates Widener's art, imbuing it with a sense of empathy and urgency. A veteran of the U.S. Air Force during NATO's Cold War era, Widener grapples with long-diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. For years, he has struggled to adjust to civilian life and, over decades, has chosen a comparatively unrooted existence. Widener's resulting peregrinations are a recurring theme in his work. Many of Widener's drawings form a travel log of his experiences around the world, especially in Europe. The drawings are map-like in appearance and dense with information.

The pictures in *The Heart of War* take visual cues from heavily relied-upon maps of the Ukraine-Russia conflict compiled by the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, D.C., an open-source intelligence and analytics organization whose up-to-date interactive maps are used widely by combatants and non-combatants alike. They are considered highly accurate reporting of the ever-fluctuating frontline and of troop movements in certain ongoing battles. These detailed geographic maps are overlaid with colors and lines denoting captured territory and enemy incursions. A series of symbols and crosshatches indicate the current status of a given area. Circles pinpoint the heaviest fighting in a 24-hour period.

Widener's recent work references various maps including the battle of Pokrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and others from November 2025. Pokrovsk, a strategically sensitive transit hub for the Donetsk region, has seen some of the fiercest fighting of the war. Despite Russia's multiple claims of capture over the past year, Ukraine still appeared to hold onto a portion of the beleaguered city. Victory for either side would represent a powerful shift of momentum in the war. During his various trips to Ukraine, Widener spent time near these areas helping in a logistical support role. While there and elsewhere in the country, he met numerous Ukrainian soldiers, many of whom have since been killed in action.

These drawings are Widener's expression of the devastating impact of the war on himself and others more broadly. They focus on the cold, calculating tone of

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military analysis juxtaposed against the ruinous destruction and suffering inevitable to all wars. On a map, terrible fighting is reduced to patterns of simple lines, colors, and symbols on a page. But Widener uses dense black marker on the periphery of his "maps" to evoke the shapes of bombed, hollowed-out concrete buildings he witnessed in the aftermath of fighting throughout Eastern Ukraine. Now the pain and fear are no longer distant or theoretical. They are deeply felt and experienced by the artist.

The numbers stamped across the composition are found throughout Widener's oeuvre. On one level, they are an intuitive attempt by a numbers savant to find order in the chaos seen firsthand. He uses numbers to reveal the existence of recurring patterns in the universe, predictable truths that underlie even the most inexplicable of human follies. Looking closely, the sequences of numbers go forward into the future suggesting the ripple effect trauma can have on families and communities. On another level, counting numbers is an effective coping mechanism for an autistic artist with PTSD under tremendous stress. It is an intensely personal response to an extraordinary moment in human history.

George Widener's work has been exhibited worldwide, including *Hiding Places: Memory in the Arts* (John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, 2011); *The Alternative Guide to the Universe* (Hayward Gallery, London 2012); *Secret Universe* (Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin 2013); *Great and Mighty Things: Outsider Art from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 2013); *Memory Palaces: Inside the Collection of Audrey B. Heckler* (American Folk Art Museum, New York, 2019); *Outsider Art: The Collection of Victor F. Keen* (Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, 2021). His work is in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the American Folk Art Museum, New York; Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland; the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands; the Treger Saint Silvestre Collection, São João da Madeira, Portugal; the abcd Collection, Paris, France; and the Hamburger Bahnhof National Museum, Berlin, Germany.

The Heart of War: George Widener's Ukraine opens at Hirschl & Adler Modern on Thursday, March 19 and runs through Friday, April 24, 2026. Located on the 9th floor of the historically landmarked Fuller Building, at the corner of 57th Street and

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Madison Avenue, Hirschl & Adler Modern is open Monday through Friday, from 9:30 am to 5:15 pm.

For additional information or images, call Thomas B. Parker, Director, or Shelley Farmer, Director, at 212-535-8810 or email at TomP@HirschlAndAdler.com or ShelleyF@HirschlAndAdler.com. For an online preview of the exhibition please visit our website at www.HirschlAndAdler.com.