

NORTHSHORE

CHICAGO'S GUIDE TO FINE LIVING

WWW.NORTHSHOREMAG.COM • SEPTEMBER 2003 \$3.00

PRELUDE

Encounter

Two fateful years ago, as firefighters sifted for life through the smoldering ruins of the felled World Trade Center, Highland Park resident **Yelena Klairmont** planted herself at her easel and poured her emotions onto canvas. What blossomed was a sketch of a hardened but sorrowful blue-collared Everyman, drawn vividly with chalky pastels in the populist style of 1930s Soviet Realism. Looming over his left shoulder is the ghostly shape of the crumbled Twin Towers, a reminder of how 9/11 rendered even the strongest among us completely defenseless.

When Klairmont exhibited her work at the American Academy of Art in the Loop, it affected one model so deeply that he asked to pose for a second painting: a more triumphant portrait of heroism depicting a fireman raising his ax to the heavens. It now hangs in the Highland Park Fire Department Headquarters, not far from her first piece in the Public Works Building on Route 22 in Highland Park.

"In the end, we will prevail. That's what I wanted to show with these pictures," says Klairmont, who began painting less than five years ago. "I wanted to show everyday people, the union of people. I felt it was more important to show that than the actual tragedy."

Klairmont hopes to finish a series of 9/11 paintings depicting the 24 hours between the morning of 9/10 and 9/11, the final moments before a nation came face-to-face with its own mortality. PG

