Creating Resistance by Engaging Destruction: Three Contemporary Feminist Artists from Ukraine

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture

Department of Art and Design

University of Alberta

Abstract

Destruction and production are two closely linked phenomenon within contemporary feminist art in Ukraine. Ukraine is currently embroiled in a context marked by destruction in the form of the annexation of Crimea and war in the Eastern Donbas region, along with the physical and emotional trauma accompanying these events. Feminist artists are addressing this context in innovative ways, resisting growing nationalism, militarism, and the polarization of various segments of Ukrainian society. In the 2010s, artists began openly proclaiming themselves as feminists to address such issues as the representation and visibility of the female body, motherhood, sexuality, abortion, LGBTQIA+ rights, and labour. Concurrently, as these artworks emerged within public spaces in the streets of Ukraine, they were also the targets of attacks by conservative and far-right groups that destroyed the works through various means.

I analyze three artworks that have been destroyed, address destruction, and incorporate destruction as an artistic technique. These artworks are Maria Kulikovska's video performance *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* (2019), Dana Kavelina's banner created for the March 8th demonstrations in 2019, and Valentyna Petrova's tapestry and performance-based work *Self-Portrait* (2017). My analyses are based on four interviews I conducted in Ukraine over three weeks in the summer of 2019 with artists Maria Kulikovska and Oksana Briukhovetska, art historian Oleksandra Kushchenko, and activist Marta Bonyk from the organization The Feminist Workshop (Феміністична Майстерня), and my experiences attending exhibitions and exploring Kyiv and L'viv. I have supplemented my interviews and observations with primary sources in the form of interviews published by other artists, curators, and academics, exhibition catalogs, and reviews. My research is informed by my training in visual culture, the history of art in Ukraine, and feminist discourses within the post-Soviet space. I argue that artists who incorporate destruction within their artistic practise channel the energy from Ukraine's turbulent context in order to propose alternative possibilities for the present and future based on empathy, empowerment, and solidarity.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Kalyna Somchynsky. This research project received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Project name “The Aesthetics of Ukrainian Feminisms: A Study of Contemporary Feminist Art in Ukraine”, No. Pro00091396, June 19, 2019.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have come together without the support, dedication, and mentorship from several individuals dear to my heart.

I am indebted for the guidance from my supervisor Lianne McTavish, and my second and third readers Natalie Loveless, and Jessica Zychowicz who have read several versions of this thesis and provided invaluable feedback throughout this process. The faculty in the Department of Art and Design has shaped me into the scholar I am becoming. Thank you to Joan Greer, Betsy Boone, and Steven Harris for mentorship throughout my education.

I would not have been able to dedicate the appropriate time and energy towards my research without the financial support from The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and the Dr. Ivan Iwanciw and Dr. Myroslawa Mysko-Iwanciw Endowment Fund, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the Canada Graduate Scholarship Master's Scholarship, and the Harriet Snowball Winspear Graduate Scholarship.

Travelling to Ukraine and conducting interviews were integral components of my research. Thank you to Maria Kulikovska, Oksana Briukhovetska, Marta Bonyk, and Oleksandra Kushchenko for meeting with me in Ukraine, sharing resources with me, and sitting down for conversations about art and feminism. I am also grateful for my new friend Anita Nemet who spent several days taking me around L'viv to various exhibitions and speaking with me casually about life in Ukraine. My trip to Ukraine would not have been complete without a reunion with my dear family, the Tymchyshyn's: Natalia, Petro and Halya, Andriy, Sasha, Davyd, and Vika. Thank you for showing me a wonderful day in Nemyliv that I will always treasure. Щиро вам усім дякую і я сподіваю наш наступний зустріч!

I am very lucky to have a wonderful family that has been nothing short of supportive and excited for me throughout this journey. My Mama Natalia has listened to both my complaints and exciting moments providing emotional support while my Tato Bohdan has talked through issues in Eastern European history with me and read my drafts as an unofficial fifth reader. My sister Oksana travelled with me to Ukraine to provide me with company and someone to share those memories with. I will always be grateful for the love from my Babusia Marusia and aunts Hanya and Lida who have continually told me how important my work is and how proud they are of me.

My dear friends have been extraordinary as I have written this thesis, meeting with me for much needed breaks in the form of food, drinks, and laughter. Thank you to my girls at Best Buds, Kimberly Karpan, Jessica Potter, and Carolyn Sikstrom for distracting me with flowers, candy, and jokes. I will always be grateful for my friend Molly McLaughlin who has always been willing to discuss feminism and politics while we scheme how to change the world. We will do it.

Last, but not least, I must thank the two very important individuals who have cared for me, talked through difficult ideas with me, and taken care of my mental health through this experience: my adorable dog Kaapi and my loving husband, Kyle. We have accomplished another wonderful thing together.

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Introduction

On a hot August day in 2019, I walked through the bustling streets of L'viv's city centre looking for the address of the grassroots organization The Feminist Workshop (Феміністична Майстерня) as part of my research on contemporary feminist art in Ukraine. I entered a dark passageway after spotting the building number, unsure whether I was headed in the right direction. There were no signs inside the corridor, but the gender symbol for women had been painted on the wall, reassuring me that I was following the instructions I received correctly. At the end of the passageway, I found a door that opened onto a small courtyard where the entrance to the office was located. It was amazing how quiet and serene it was inside this space just a stone's throw from one of the busiest squares in L'viv. The Feminist Workshop—which interested me by its efforts to create a welcoming space for individuals to explore various feminist concerns through lectures, book clubs, demonstrations, and art exhibits—crafted an alternate reality behind the main facades.[1] As my conversation with one of the employees proceeded, the space began to emerge as a metaphor for feminism in Ukraine: a persistent, responsive, intervention into the status quo resiliently and strategically oscillating between visibility and invisibility.

During my travels in Ukraine, I encountered how the country has been shaped by the ebb and flow of revolution. The old order had collapsed, but as new systems were implemented the distinction between the old and new became evidently muddier. The streets of Kyiv have been marked by the Revolution of Dignity that engaged the country in mass protests through 2013-

[1] The Feminist Workshop (@femworkshop), https://www.instagram.com/femworkshop/; "About Us", *The Feminist Workshop*, accessed March 30, 2020, https://femwork.org/about-us/; The Feminist Workshop (Феміністична Майстерня), https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt6wCM7T9ldR9yELT06TO5Q.

2014 in response to former president Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia. Kyiv's Independence Square (Майдан Незалежності) and adjacent streets are surrounded by official and unofficial memorials to the protesters killed by government sniper fire during the most violent days of the protests. In anticipation of Independence Day celebrations in 2019, interpretive panels were displayed by governmental organizations around the square describing the phases of the protests and local initiatives underway to preserve their memory such as the opening of a museum. These panels accompanied unofficial displays such as printed photographs of those who died in the protests taped onto trees and light-posts leading up to Instytutska Street (вулиця Інститутська) where an official memorial had been erected. The Revolution of Dignity physically altered Kyiv's cityscape, but what emotional, social, and economic effects did it have on Ukraine's population and whose voices did it raise over others?

My research trip coincided with Independence Day celebrations in Kyiv and I had the chance to experience how this occasion was acknowledged in the capital. The Independence Day celebrations emphasized the ongoing war taking place in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, making visible a conflict that is not evident while walking through the streets of Kyiv or L'viv. On Independence Day morning, Maidan Nezalezhnosti was full of people wearing Ukrainian shirts and some in army fatigue awaiting the day's events. The official ceremony was initiated by a moment of silence followed by 100 bell tolls to honor those who have lost their lives both in the Maidan protests and the ongoing war. This was followed by pop stars singing a rendition of Ukraine's national anthem *Shche ne vmerla Ukrainy* (Ще не вмерла України) and a speech from president Volodymyr Zelensky. It was President Zelensky's first Independence Day as leader of Ukraine after being elected in spring 2019 on the promise of ending the war. He began

his speech with a harrowing description of his morning routine characterized by checking to see how many casualties occurred overnight in the ongoing conflict. Shortly after the opening ceremony, a "Walk of Dignity" honoring veterans, soldiers, teachers, nurses, athletes, and diplomats took place. Zelensky decided not to organize the customary Independence Day military parade and instead allocated bonuses to soldiers currently fighting in the war, although a "March for the Defenders of Ukraine" took place down Khreshchatyk Street following the official ceremony. It became evident to me while witnessing the Independence Day celebrations that the ongoing war continues to shape the country in ways that may not be visible, although they are emotionally, financially, and physically felt. I decided that I needed to consider the impact of the war in my research on feminist art but first, I had to find the feminist voices responding to this context of turmoil, war, displacement, and rising nationalism.

Feminist artists, activists, and scholars address the socio-political climate of post-Euromaidan Ukraine with alternative perspectives to the official narratives that one encounters during the celebrations such as the one described above, on interpretive panels, and in the National Museum. Like the Feminist Workshop's office located behind the busy storefronts of L'viv, feminist activity exists on the margins of Ukrainian society—although the distance between the margins and the centre is constantly being renegotiated. Jessica Zychowicz characterizes how the term functions in Ukrainian society as "the perpetual placeholder; the "bad word" that slips off the page and out of the recipe, a stigma and stigmata, a dysfunctional overstatement, or just the unseemly choice of a transgressive woman—feminism".[2] Feminism has multiple interpretations in Ukrainian society and its meaning changes depending on who uses

[2] Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women: Feminism. Art, and Revolution in Twenty First Century Ukraine*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 18.

the term in what context. Simultaneously, it is also a term that individuals are constantly in the process of trying to define and its parameters are widened, challenged, and attacked in the process. In this thesis, I explore how individuals employ feminism as a strategy of critique and resistance to challenge political, cultural, and religious institutions. It can be both overt and subliminal, drawing positive and negative attention, and lingers in the tensions created by these interactions.

The interviews I conducted revealed that many feminisms exist in Ukraine as individuals forge their own relationships and interpretations of the term. However, feminism is generally understood within circles that accept its potential as "a social theory and the critique of patriarchy as an unjust social system and a movement that uplifts the status of women within larger society. Feminism is the fight for equal rights and opportunities for men and women."[3] Even within these circles that embrace feminism as a productive discourse, debates continually ensue regarding how feminism is defined and put into practise. The artists and activists that I met in Ukraine elaborated on this basic definition with their own experiences and the relationships within their artworks. Through these sites, they allowed me to learn about contemporary Ukraine through various critical feminist lenses. Their personal experiences, stories surrounding several recent and subversive feminist artworks that they shared with me, and the artworks themselves have shaped the direction of this thesis.

Feminist artists in Ukraine shape and lay claim to the space between the centre and the periphery in various ways. One key intervention—and the one explored within this thesis—is when artists respond to moments when their bodies and artworks are targeted by derisive

[3] Tamara Martsenyuk, *Чому не варто боятися фемінізму* [Why it is not worth fearing feminism], (Kyiv, Publishing House "Komora", 2018), 7.

retaliation and physical attacks. Some individuals I interviewed in Ukraine described moments when feminist artworks were destroyed against the will of the artists in politically motivated incidents. For example, feminist artists and art historians recalled how Dana Kavelina's 2018 banner created for International Women's Day was destroyed by far-right counter protesters.[4] The artworks at the centre of this thesis, Kavelina's 2019 banner created in response to the attacks in 2018, Maria Kulikovska's video performance *Let Me Say: It Is Not Forgotten* consisting of Kulikovska shooting her own sculptures, and Valentyna Petrova's performance-based work *Self-Portrait* composed of the artist ripping apart a tapestry she embroidered, utilize destruction as an artistic strategy. These artworks transform instances when their artworks were destroyed against the artist's will or the turbulent forces of contemporary Ukrainian society from an annihilating force into a productive force that challenges and renegotiates power relations. The artists do not let the destruction of their artwork silence them, rather it motivates them to use destruction to their advantage, to take control of oppressive forces and propose subjective, and complex ways of building presents and futures. This is not to say that destruction as utilized in times of war or domestic violence is justified or positive because it can be reconceptualized as productive, but rather to suggest that destruction can be an artistic strategy that overcomes oppressive violence and testifies to continual perseverance. The application of destruction in art challenges binary narratives of "heroes and villains" to make space for the ambiguities of everyday existence in times of conflict. The analysis of destruction-production will sit at points

[4] Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine; Oksana Briukhovetska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 6, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine; Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.

of tension, and I hope to discuss these tensions in terms that avoid further polarization as heightening animosity will never bring peace to a society in conflict.

I will focus on the artwork of three contemporary feminist artists engaging destruction in their artwork: Maria Kulikovska, Dana Kavelina, and Valentyna Petrova. The artworks analyzed in each chapter have been created following the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-2014 and respond to the changing political, social, and economic climate of Ukraine as it is forced to address the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine. These artworks exemplify the growing interest in feminisms within Ukrainian society throughout the post-revolutionary period, characterized by Olenka Dmytryk as a shift from regarding oneself as "I am a feminist, but…" to "I am a feminist, therefore…".[5] As artists have begun openly interrogating issues of gender discrimination, gender roles, representation, sexuality, and the body within their work, they have also faced controversy and derision especially from the far-right, conservative segments of society who have destroyed their artworks. Kulikovska and Kavelina address the destruction of their artwork by applying destruction within their subsequent artworks, while Petrova uses destruction as an artistic strategy to address unsustainable and exploitative socio-economic systems in Ukraine. They reshape destruction, in the process reclaiming their power to suggest alternative ways of moulding Ukrainian society.

[5] Olenka Dmytryk, ""I'm a Feminist Therefore…": The Art of Gender and Sexual Dissent in 2010s Ukraine and Russia", *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies* 2, 1 (2016): 138.

Historiography

My research on the intersection of feminism and destruction within contemporary art in Ukraine is informed by the numerous studies on feminism in the post-Soviet space that began to emerge in the 1990s. During the Soviet period, state enforced communism declared the gender question solved as men and women were officially considered equal and provided with equal opportunities.[6] After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, scholars and women's organizations in Ukraine began addressing the diverse women's and later LGBTQIA+ and men's issues that had been neglected during the Soviet period and the changing circumstances arising as a result of adapting to a capitalist economic system.[7] Although scholars and some Non-Governmental Organizations were already addressing gender issues in their work through the 1990s and into the 2000s, an "allergy to feminism" percolated in Ukrainian society and continues into the present moment due to the widespread belief that it was a Western import without application in the Ukrainian context.[8] Over the nearly thirty years of Ukrainian independence, scholars, activists, and artists have woven their own relationships with feminism, bringing it into the public space to address wide-ranging concerns such as the representation of women, gender roles, domestic violence, and the war.

The study of feminism in Ukraine both by local scholars and members of the diaspora has been approached from diverse fields such as literary theory, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, art history, literature, visual art, and activism. This brief historiography will summarize

[6] Rosalind Marsh, "Introduction: women's studies and women's issues in Russia, Ukraine, and the post-Soviet states", in *Women in Russia and Ukraine* edited by Rosalind Marsh, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.
[7] For anthologies that address the broad gender questions within independent Ukraine see Rosalind Marsh eds, *Women in Russia and Ukraine,* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova eds., *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
[8] Oksana Kis', "Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine: From "Allergy" to Last Hope", *Kultura Enter* (2013), np.

the works of figures who argue that feminism is an important critical tool within post-Soviet Ukrainian society—a key concern for the artists whose work I explore in this thesis. Solomea Pavlychko was one of the first Ukrainian scholars to explore feminism within the Ukrainian context, analyzing the works of literary figures such as Lesia Ukrainka and Maria Vilinska (also known as Marko Vovchok). Her writings argue that feminism was a tendency of the modernist period and therefore has roots in Ukraine. In the 1990s she drew attention to important debates such as the relationship between the fight for women's rights and nation building following Ukrainian independence. Pavlychko proposes that although independence is crucial for Ukraine, women's rights often fall subordinate to nationalist goals.[9] Throughout the 2000s scholars such as Oksana Kis' and Tatiana Zhurzhenko have continued these discussions on women and nation building, falling on opposite sides of the argument.[10] The debate on how the fight for women's rights can reconcile with nationalism is an underlying theme within the artworks studied within my thesis and an important debate continuing in Ukraine today. Kis' and Zhurzhenko also study the lives of Ukrainian women throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries such as peasants, prisoners of the GULAG, and family structures, drawing attention to diverse realities, struggles, and examples of resistance.[11] Sociologist Tamara Martsenyuk has continued this

[9] Solomea Pavlychko, *Фемінізм* [Feminism], (Kyiv: Publishing House in the Name of Solomea Pavlychko "Osnovy", 2002).

[10] Oksana Kis', "(Re)Constructing Ukrainian Women's History: Actors, Authors, and Narratives", in *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine,* edited by Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova, 152-179, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Feminist (De)constructions of Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space", in *Mapping Difference: the many faces of women in contemporary Ukraine,* edited by Marian J. Rubchak, 173-192, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

[11] Oksana Kis', "Жінка в традиційні українській культурі друга половина XIX-початок XX ст." [Women in traditional Ukrainian culture in the second half of the 19th-early 20th centuries], (L'viv: Institute of Ethnography Ukraine, 2008); Oksana Kis', "Українки в гулагу: вижити значить перемогти" [Ukrainian women in the Gulag: to survive means to overcome], (L'viv: National Academy of Ukraine, Institute of Ethnography, 2017); Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Strong Women, Weak State: Family Politics and Nation Building in Post-Soviet Ukraine", in *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, edited by Kathleen Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias, 23-43, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004).

tendency by focusing on the lives of contemporary women to counter negative stereotypes that continue to surround feminism in her popular published text *Why It's Not Worth Fearing Feminism* (Чому не варто боятися фемінізму).[12] Pavlychko, Kis', Zhurzhenko, and Martsenyuk propose that feminism has a place in Ukrainian society beyond academia in the lives of ordinary citizens, broadening the definition to make it relevant to developments in Ukraine.

Artists and activists have demonstrated the pertinence of feminism in Ukraine, likewise to their academic counterparts, by engaging with feminism in diverse visual forms. During the inter-revolutionary period between the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-14, the study of feminism in Ukraine increased as activist groups began occupying public space to bring gender issues to the attention of wider society.[13] The most prominent groups at this time included FEMEN and Feminist Ofenzywa who frequently utilized art and performance within their demonstrations. Academics globally began responding to the activities of the aforementioned groups as evidenced by the writing of Jessica Zychowicz, Olenka Dmytryk, and Marian Rubchak.[14] Artists engaged feminism as a discourse following the Revolution of Dignity, although feminist art remains on the margins of the contemporary art scene in Ukraine. Artists and academics who often worked very closely with one another began organizing, documenting, and publishing about feminist art initiatives in Ukraine as evident in

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[12] Tamara Martsenyuk, *Чому не варто боятися фемінізму* [Why It's Not Worth Fearing Feminism].

[13] The term "inter-revolutionary period" was coined by Jessica Zychowicz in her book *Superfluous Women: Art, Feminism, and Revolution in Twenty-First Century Ukraine.* She uses the term "inter-revolutionary generation" to describe the time period, political dynamics, and the students, activists, and artists who envisioned a better life between the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014).
Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 377.

[14] Olenka Dmytryk, ""I'm a Feminist Therefore…""; Jessica Zychowicz, "Two Bad Words: FEMEN and Feminism in Independent Ukraine", *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 29, no. 2 (2011): 215-227; Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women;* Marian Rubchak, "Seeing pink: searching for gender justice through opposition in Ukraine", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, 1 (2012): 55-72.

the work of Oksana Briukhovetska, Tamara Zlobina and Jessica Zychowicz.[15] Several of these individuals have continued to publish, curate, and produce artwork, creating a larger feminist community and opportunities for collaboration between artists, activists, and scholars. For example, Oksana Briukhovetska, co-founder of the Visual Culture Research Centre (VCRC) in Kyiv, has curated several exhibitions including *Motherhood* (2015), *What About Me is Feminine?* (2015), *TEXTUS: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism* (2017), and *I am a Ukrainian Woman* (2018).[16] Briukhovetska has also published several texts outlining a history of feminist art in Ukraine and along with Lesia Kulchynska recently co-published a series of interviews with feminists in Ukraine, Poland, France, and the United States entitled *The Right to Truth.* The work of activists and scholars Maria Mayerchyk and Olha Plakhotnik, former members of Feminist Ofenzywa, have also been instrumental in promoting feminist discourses in Ukraine through both their past activism and recent launch of the online, open-access journal *Feminist Critique.*[17]. These texts, often written by individuals intimately intertwined with the art and activist movements they discuss in their writings, have proven to be invaluable primary and secondary sources that helped me to establish the artistic context of contemporary Ukraine in my thesis.

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[15] Oksana Briukhovetska, "Образ жертви і емансипація. Нарис про українську арт-сцену і фемінізм: Український фемінізм мінус Фемен" [A Portrait of Sacrifice and Emancipation. An Overview of the Ukrainian Art Scene and Feminism: Ukrainian Feminism Minus Femen], *Prostory* (September 3, 2017), https://prostory.net.ua/ua/krytyka/139-obraz-zhertvy-i-emansypatsiia-narys-pro-ukrainsku-art-stsenu-i-feminizm.;Tamara Zlobina, "Masquerading as Womanlines: Female Subjectivity in Ukrainian Contemporary Art", in *New Imaginaries: Youthful Reinvention of Ukraine's Cultural Paradigm*, edited and translated by Marian J. Rubchak, 141-169, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

[16] Oksana Briukhovetska, "Textus". *Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, Kyiv, 2017, Exhibition Catalog; Oksana Briukhovetska, "Жінка та її тіло [The Woman and Her Body], *Political Critique* (December 15, 2015): 1-6. https://politkrytyka.org/2015/12/15/zhinka-ta-yiyi-tilo/; Oksana Briukhovetska, ""Я Українка" постер-кампанія, яка закликає замислитися над статусом жінок-заробітчанок" [""I am Ukrainian": a poster campaign that calls for reflection on that status of women-workers"], *UkrainianPravda.com*, October 28, 2018, https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2018/10/28/233858/; Oksana Briukhovetska and Lesia Kulchynska eds., *Право на істину: розмови про мистецтво і фемінізм* [The Right to Truth: Conversations on Art and Feminism], Kyiv, 2019.

[17] Feminist Critique, https://feminist.krytyka.com/en.

The artworks discussed within this thesis respond to the turbulent context that followed the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014. The Revolution of Dignity is often also commonly referred to as the Euromaidan Revolution, the Ukrainian Revolution, and the Maidan Revolution. I have chosen to refer to this moment as the Revolution of Dignity because it encapsulates what Alya Shandra describes the broader "burning desire for another way of life of the protesters and hope for things changing for the better".[18] The term suggests that the protests were triggered by a culmination of events, authoritarian rule, and low standard of life, set over the edge by Yanukovych's decision not to sign as association agreement with the European Union. It leaves space for citizens to subjectively conceptualize the significance of the Revolution and their diverse stories, accounts, and interpretation of the present moment.[19] I have consulted studies on the Revolution of Dignity and the ongoing war, although it is important to consider that this discourse is diverse, complex, and ongoing. Many scholars continue to study how traditional gender roles were reinforced or challenged on the Maidan and how feminist groups participated and intervened in the protests with events such as the Night of Women's Solidarity and women's battalions such as the *Olha Kobylianska Zhinocha Sotnya* (Ольга Кобилянська жіноча сотня).[20] With the outbreak of war, scholars are studying the experiences of female soldiers,

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[18] Alya Shandra, "Dignity After the Revolution of Dignity", *Euromaidan Press,* November 26, 2019, http://euromaidanpress.com/2019/11/26/ukraine-dignity-after-the-revolution-of-dignity-euromaidan/.

[19] The term Revolution of Dignity also defies the urge to geopolitically categorize Ukraine within the confines of the East/West binary suggested by the term Euromaidan. The term Euromaidan assumes that the protests were only triggered by President Yanukovych refusing to sign the Association Agreement with the EU (in favor of ties with Russia, the East) and demonstrated the desire of the protesters to be part of Europe (the West). In reality, the conditions and aims of the Revolution were much broader and complex. Defaulting on the East/West binary also applies the value judgements of corrupt, backwards, authoritarian to regimes found in the so called "East" and liberal, free, and democratic to regimes in the "West".
One of many studies that problematizes the East/West binary in the study of feminism within post-socialist countries is Jennifer Suchland, "Is postsocialism transnational?", *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 36, no. 4 (2011): 837-862.

[20] The Night of Women's Solidarity was organized to bring attention to the diverse roles women took on during the protests, thanking women who worked as medics, journalists, built barricades, and prepared food. It sought to

gender discrimination within the military, and slowly the experiences of displaced peoples, human rights abuses such as sexual assault, rape, and torture, and domestic violence.[21] Much like the discourse on feminism generally, studies span diverse disciplines and contentious debates continue. I have explored this scholarship to better situate how contemporary feminist artists are similarly contributing to this discourse through visual and performance-based mediums.

My thesis has been heavily informed by the work of Jessica Zychowicz and Redi Koobak because they both explore the relationship between art and feminism in different post-Soviet regions. Their research has provided me with methodological considerations as they discuss how they interpreted the intimate relationships they formed with the people and places they study.

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establish an equal place on the Maidan for women as men while criticizing the events culminating in contemporary Ukraine through a feminist framework.
The Olha Kobylianska Zhinocha Sotnya was established as an all-female battalion on the Maidan after women were excluded from defensive positions amongst the barricades by several of their male counterparts. It was named after the modernist writer and feminist.
A few studies of gender during the Revolution of Dignity include the following sources, although this list is in no way exhaustive.
Emily S. Channell-Justice, "We're Not Just Sandwiches": Europe, Nation, and Feminist (Im)possibilities on Ukraine's Maidan", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Vol 42, no. 3 (2017): 717-741;
Sarah D. Phillips, "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's protests: Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism on the Maidan", *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society* 41, No. 3 (2014): 414-426; Olga Plakhotnik, Olga and Maria Mayerchuk, "Між колоніальністю і націоналізмом: генеалогії фемінічного активізму в Україні" [Between colonialism and nationalism: a genealogy of feminist activism in Ukraine", *Feminist Critique: East European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies* August 2019: 1-17; Olesya Khromeychuk, "From the Maidan to the Donbas: The Limitations on Choice for Women in Ukraine", in *Gender and Choice After Socialism*, edited by Lynne Attwood, Elisabeth Schimpfössl, and Marina Yusupova, 47-78, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plakhotnik, "Ukrainian Feminism at the Crossroad of National, Postcolonial and (post)Soviet: Theorizing the Maidan Events 2013-2014", *Krytyka*. November 24, 2015, https://krytyka.com/en/community/blogs/ukrainian-feminism-crossroad-national-postcolonial-and-postsoviet-theorizing-maidan; Tatiana Burejchak, and Olena Petrenko, "Канапки, Січ та «бандерівки»" [Sandwiches, Sich, and "Banderivky"], *Zaxid*, January 8, 2014, http://zaxid.net/news/showNews.do?kanapki_sich_ta_banderivki&objectId=1300428; Oleksandra Wallo, *Ukrainian Women Writers and the National Imaginary: From the Collapse of the USSR to the Euromaidan*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).
[21] A few studies on the ongoing war and the intersection with gender include the following sources: Tamara Martsenyuk, Maria Berlinska, Anna Kvit, and Ganna Grytsenko*, ""The Invisible Battalion": Women's Participation in ATO Military Operations"*, (Kyiv: UN Women Ukraine, 2016); Eugenia Benigni, "Women, Peace and Security in Ukraine: Women's hardship and power from the Maidan to the conflict", *Security and Human Rights* 27 (2016): 59-84; Olena Strelnyk, "Gendered Protests: Mothers' Civic Activism and the War in Ukraine", *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 11, no. 2 (2019): 103-124.

Similar to myself, both scholars discuss navigating the insider/outsider dynamics inherent to their work in regions with complex cultural and political histories that share a Soviet past. Zychowicz is a forerunner in the study of feminism between the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) in Ukraine. She fuses an interdisciplinary approach and several years of field research, interviews, and experience living in Ukraine to explore how artists and activists have navigated and shaped the socio-cultural sphere of the inter-revolutionary period.[22] Koobak, a native Estonian educated in American and Western European universities, approaches feminism in Estonia by studying the photography of queer artist Anna-Stina Treumund, reflecting on the challenges of applying Western feminist discourses to a post-Soviet context where she argues they are frequently incompatible.[23] In addition to Zychowicz's and Koobak's theorizing on writing about feminist art in the post-Soviet space, I have also consulted the essays written in *Gender Check: A Reader Art and Theory in Eastern Europe* accompanying the exhibition *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2009-2010).[24] This anthology of essays addresses the study of gender across various countries composing the post-communist space, providing both an overview of the region and theoretical considerations to studying art created in former Socialist and communist countries. I apply the methodological considerations and foundational work on feminism in the post-communist space within these sources to my own analyses on artwork, focusing on how feminist artworks engage destruction in diverse ways.

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[22] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women.*

[23] Redi Koobak, *Whirling Stories: Postsocialist Feminist Imaginaries and the Visual Arts,* (Linköping, Sweden: TEMA-The Department of Thematic Studies Linköpings universitet, 2013).

[24] Pejić, Bojana and ERSTE Foundation Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Lugwig Wien, eds. *Gender Check: A Reader. Art and Theory in Eastern Europe.* Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010.

The destruction and censorship of artwork has been employed as a political gesture on numerous occasions historically, internationally, and in contemporary Ukraine. Notable examples by individuals include the instant a British suffragette destroyed Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery with an axe in 1914 and when an elderly man splashed paint on Christ Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* at the Sensations Exhibit (1999) at the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Historically, state sanctioned examples of destruction and censorship include Adolf Hitler's looting and destruction of several modernist works during World War II, and the Soviet Union's censorship of art that did not express the ideals of the state. In contemporary Ukraine, numerous examples have occurred through the 2010s including the censorship of *The Ukrainian Body* exhibition in 2012[25], the vandalism of Volodymyr Kuznetsov's painting *Koliivshina. Last Judgement* by the director of Mystetskyi Aresenal in 2013[26], and the destruction of Davyd Chychkan's exhibition *The Lost Opportunity* by far-right individuals in 2017.[27] Jessica Zychowicz has studied these instances within the frame of negotiating the memory of the

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[25] In 2012 an exhibit co-curated by Oksana Briukhovetska entitled *The Ukrainian Body* opened at the Visual Culture Research Centre at that time located within Kyiv Mohyla University. The exhibit sought to stimulate an embodied awareness in viewers of how our bodies are subject to the environment, relations with others, and are framed by the political context. Subsequently, Kyiv Mohyla University president Serhiy Kvit censored the exhibit and shut down all activities of the VCRC stating that "It's not an exhibition, it's shit".
"Statement of the Visual Culture Research Centre, National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy (Kyiv, Ukraine)", *Artleaks*, February 11, 2012, https://art-leaks.org/2012/02/11/statement-of-the-visual-culture-research-center-national-university-of-kyiv-mohyla-academy-kyiv-ukraine/; Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 278.

[26] In this example the director of the gallery threw black paint upon the painting in anticipation of a tour including former president Yiktor Yanukovych to celebrate the 1025th baptism of Kyivan Rus'. The work by Volodymyr Kuznetsov featured a pointed critique of corruption present in all levels of Ukrainian society.
Natalia Usenko, "Political Issues in Contemporary Art of Ukraine". *The Journal of Education, Culture, and Society* 2 (2014): 182-183.
Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 282.

[27] The works in the exhibition were vandalized by masked intruders in what has been described as a pogrom. The artworks questioned the state of contemporary Ukrainian society following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, demonstrating Chychkan's concern that Ukrainian society is embracing far right ideologies that counter the value espoused during the protests.
Vasyl Cherepanyn, "The Lost Opportunity: After the Pogrom", *Political Critique* , (February 17, 2017), http://politicalcritique.org/cee/ukraine/2017/vcrc-exhibition-art-attack/; Visual Culture Research Centre in Kiev Reopens <<The Lost Opportunity>>, *Political Critique*, February 13, 2017, http://politicalcritique.org/cee/ukraine/2017/vcrc-reopens-attack/.

communist past and the legislation and arbitrary application of a set of laws labelled 'decommunication' which she argues have furthered regimes of censorship across multiple sectors of Ukrainian society, as officials employ similar means as their Soviet predecessors to control cultural production.[28]

My research into feminist artworks that have been destroyed and the artists who respond by incorporating destruction into their work have been informed by Kristine Stiles's studies on destruction art and the links between destruction and trauma within art. Stiles describes destruction art as an artistic tendency practised by several artists in the Cold War era, culminating in the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) which took place in London in 1966.[29] She describes this tendency—which isn't limited to the artists who participated in DIAS—in the following manner: "destruction in art introduced destructive processes into artistic vocabulary in order to collapse means, subject matter, and affect into a unified expression for the purpose of commenting directly on destruction in life".[30] Destruction art channels and responds to tumultuous physical, political, and psychological circumstances by defying definitions, binary relationships, and dwelling in the space created by the destructive act. My analyses explore how the tendency of destruction art translates in a society navigating war, displacement, nationalism, militarism, economic hardship, and labour where feminist voices that question the status quo are often met with animosity. The works analyzed in this thesis incorporate destruction as both content and form, at times simultaneously, to comment on how bodies are sites where destructive forces interact and are resisted.

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[28] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 348-349.
[29] Kristine Stiles, "The Story of the Destruction in Art Symposium and the 'DIAS Affect'", in *Destruction: Documents of Contemporary Art,* edited by Sven Spieker, (London: Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT Press, 2017), 105.
[30] Stiles, "The Story of the Destruction in Art Symposium), 105.

My analysis of Kulikovska, Kavelina, and Petrova's work contributes to the discourse on feminisms and feminist art in Ukraine by combining a close visual analysis with the interviews I conducted in Ukraine, and my experiences travelling the country. I began my research by organizing interviews and then reflected on my interactions with artists, activists, and the spaces I encountered conducting research. These reflections are supported by my training in visual culture, analyzing not only artworks but also the multi-sensorial events and places where these artworks are situated more generally as evidence. After returning from my trip, I selected three artworks that best represented my impressions of feminist art and activity in Ukraine. My analyses of the artwork use the relationships created in the artwork between the composition, formal elements such as colour, texture, and scale, materiality, exhibition practises, and the body as evidence alongside the aforementioned research. After identifying the most pressing questions raised by the relationships in the site of representation, I situate the artists and artworks as both responsive to and agents within the socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary Ukraine. They are not removed from the contexts they engage but are immersed physically and psychologically within them. Close readings of individual artworks in combination with considerations of context, interviews, artist statements, and exhibition catalogs privilege subjective and partial accounts of contemporary life embedded within artworks beyond what the artist may have intended. I argue that in the context of contemporary Ukraine, the instability of the art object—as evidenced by its destruction and ephemeral qualities—is significant as it challenges fixed definitions of the citizen, the nation, femininity, masculinity, victims, and perpetrators that have become prevalent in the post-Maidan reality. Rather than suggesting that destruction silences and censors opposition, I argue that feminist artists harness this energy to literally break open discussions, stereotypes, and patriarchal socio-cultural structures.

My Location and Methodology

Exploring contemporary feminist art in Ukraine and its interplay with destruction has been a challenging endeavour full of constant self-reflection and re-evaluation of my methodology. My thesis is supported by the interviews I conducted, prior published interviews conducted by others, texts, artworks, and my own visual analyses. Before leaving for Ukraine, I compiled a series of interview questions approved by the Ethics Review Board at the University of Alberta. My interview questions were also reviewed by both Lianne McTavish and Jessica Zychowicz who both have experience conducting fieldwork in different capacities. Zychowicz has worked extensively within the Ukrainian art community and was able to verify that my questions were not intrusive nor had potential to harm my interviewees. She also lent me resources to consult that were not available in Canada in the preparatory stages of my research. While some of the questions were rather focused, I began each interview with a very broad statement asking individuals what they would like me to know about any aspect of their work or the Ukrainian context. Although most individuals sighed with the breadth of this question, their answers provided more insight than my focused questions. I let every individual know that I wanted them to talk about what interested them and I described my research interest in the broadest of terms so as to develop a feel for what they believed was the most important and exciting information to share. Through these interviews, I noticed that many individuals focused on their personal experiences of oppression because of their subject-position as women and viewed feminism as a way to deconstruct the power dynamic, empower themselves, and heal.[31] Many individuals spoke highly of other artists in the community, the projects they have developed, and the

[31] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine; Oksana Briukhovetska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 6, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine; Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, L'viv, Ukraine, September 1, 2019.

aggression they have faced from factions of Ukrainian society.[32] In cases where it was not possible for myself to meet with an artist for various logistical reasons, I have consulted with interviews conducted by Oksana Briukhovetska, Lesia Kulchynska, and Jessica Zychowicz. I take the interviews I conducted as my starting point to understand how these individuals situate themselves within the contemporary art scene, how they see their artistic practise, and their individual engagement with feminist discourse. The interviews have helped me understand diverse facets of the Ukrainian context, but also the individual subjectivities and diversity within feminist art being created (and destroyed) in Ukraine.

Upon receiving ethics approval from the University of Alberta, I began contacting individuals who I was interested in interviewing. I contacted artists and activists through Facebook, on the advice of Zychowicz, with a brief introduction of myself and my research. After receiving consent from these individuals to participate in my research, I arranged in-person interviews with two artists, an art historian, and an activist. In Kyiv, I interviewed artists Maria Kulikovska and Oksana Briukhovetska who worked in different capacities creating artwork and facilitating a sense of community for other artists and activists working with feminist and LGBTQIA+ themes. Kulikovska incorporates sculpture with performance-based practises to explore the relationship of the female body, and her subjective body, with dynamic and politically charged public spaces. Briukhovetska is a practising artist, curator, and co-founder of the Visual Culture Research Center (VCRC) in Kyiv. She has curated a series of foundational feminist exhibits in 2010s Ukraine often in collaboration with a larger team from the VCRC and with artists working in neighboring Poland. In L'viv, I interviewed an employee of The Feminist

[32] Oleksandra Kushchenko, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 2, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine; Oksana Briukhovetska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 6, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Workshop—an organization that fuses community building, activism, education, and art within their activities. Marta Bonyk from The Feminist Workshop graciously responded to my emails and agreed to meet with me for an interview. While researching The Feminist Workshop, I also encountered the work of art historian Oleksandra Kushchenko who was presenting a lecture series entitled "The Her-story of Art" (Істор(ії) мистецтва). Kushchenko is actively engaged in the art scene in L'viv, introduced me to some of her colleagues, and provided me with an insider's roadmap of contemporary art in Ukraine.

Upon returning home from my research trip, I selected the artworks that would be the focus of this thesis and began reflecting on my position as a researcher. I asked myself how my analyses are shaped by my position as not only a white researcher from a Western academic space, but even more significantly as a Ukrainian-Canadian throughout this process. Reflecting on my hybridized subject position and its implications in my research is crucial as it acknowledges that I do not operate outside power structures neither as an academic or by declaring "the position from which I speak".[33] My position as a Ukrainian-Canadian drove my interest in this topic, but my research and the time I spent in Ukraine have also shaped and problematized this very identifier. What does it mean to be a Ukrainian-Canadian when I am in Ukraine and what are the implications and responsibilities of this subject position?

I have always considered myself Ukrainian-Canadian even though it was my grandparents who emigrated from Ukraine at various points between 1930 and immediately following World War II. They raised my parents and myself immersed within the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, attending a Ukrainian Catholic Church, Ukrainian bilingual school, Saturday

[33] Redi Koobak and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, "Writing the Place from Which One Speaks", in *Writing Academic Texts Differently: Intersectional Feminist Methodologies and the Playful Act of Writing,* edited by Nine Lykke, (London: Routledge, 2014), 50-54.

morning Ukrainian school, speaking Ukrainian at home, celebrating on the Julian instead of the Gregorian calendar, learning to cook various traditional dishes, and through much of my primary education aware of Ukraine's history to a larger extent than Canada's. I believed that my interest in Ukrainian culture, politics, and society was 'natural' as I formulated my identity within the space of the hyphen—neither completely Ukrainian nor Canadian but privileged to step into both worlds on my own terms. Travelling to Ukraine, I became aware of the importance of addressing positionality and privilege for my thesis to carry political weight in the way it is written, not just in its content.

As much as I naively believed in the power of a transcendental national culture to tie me to Ukraine and give me the right to study it as my true motherland, neither I, nor my parents experienced the repressions of Soviet Communism, the socio-economic trauma of transitioning to a capitalist economy, or the ever present corruption that inflates the cost of utility bills. My relatives living in Ukraine did and continue to. Several people I spoke with casually mentioned loved ones currently fighting the war in Eastern Ukraine. Building relationships with relatives, artists, and fellow art historians, I realized that I did not want to embody a slogan I learned about from an artist in L'viv "L'viv: Heaven for tourists, hell for citizens" (Львів: Рай для туристів, та пекло для містян)—somebody who exploits Ukraine for their own purposes as a cheap and beautiful playground without any regard for those who live there. I am an individual born and raised in the comfort and privilege of being a young, white, woman in a Western country. I am Ukrainian without memory of hardship. I may stand in solidarity, but I am subject to a very different socio-economic-political context. As a Ukrainian-Canadian, at times I considered Ukraine as both a romantic place ripe with folk culture and also a place where people struggled; however, the struggles were minimized in the nationalistic Ukrainian-Canadian imaginary of my

generation. This is not to say that focusing solely on hardship is better, rather imagining Ukraine as a binary of cultural haven/suffering nation only perpetuates an image of Ukraine that is static, instead of its dynamism, complexity, and nuance. My thesis attempts to encapsulate the subjective, human, and often contradictory place that is Ukraine.

Power will always be implicit in the relationship between myself and my research, but I aim to navigate this power differential responsibly by focusing on the individuals involved in my research. It is important for me to keep in mind that "we have to think through how and where we are in relation to the contexts, communities, and participants we study" as a constant self-critical process in my methodology.[34] In practise, I did my best to remain open and receptive to various forms of resistance and subversion, intersubjectivities, and multiplicity emerging and being emphasized locally, rather than entering with a specific agenda, especially as a researcher bred from Canadian institutions.[35] With these considerations in mind, I left Ukraine trying to soak up what I had experienced and what had been graciously shared with me, instead of focusing on what I had hoped to "get" from my trip. I need to be a Ukrainian-Canadian ethically by not assuming the superiority of my Western education, while also considering that my Ukrainian upbringing represents a diasporic Ukraine. Through my research I have tried to remain open to ideas that may contradict the assumptions I had about Ukraine and Ukrainians while engaging in the subjectivities of the individuals I interviewed. While Ukrainians and Ukrainian-Canadians may share many traditions, histories, emotional attachments, and family trees, we are

[34] Susan Strega and Leslie Brown, "From Resistance to Resurgence", in *Research as Resistance: Revisiting Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, edited by Susan Strega and Leslie Brown, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2015), 4.
[35] Biljana Kašić, "Feminist Cross-Mainstreaming within 'East-West' Mapping", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 11, 4 (2004): 476.

indeed different, and this difference should be a point of interest, diversity, and exploration—a place to come together and learn about one another.

The interviews I conducted in Ukraine shaped the direction of my thesis as they informed the artworks I decided to feature in my research. These artworks either spoke to a theme the artist chose to highlight in the interview, were mentioned several times by artists and activists in conversation or were made by an artist who members of the community greatly respected. After selecting the artworks, I began with a visual analysis to understand how their constituent parts came together to compose the artwork and engage with the context surrounding them. Situating the work of art in the context it responds to is crucial to my methodology as I believe this process helps achieve the balance Zdenka Badinovac argues is necessary to the study of post-communist art. She describes this crossroads as:

> If we talk about art creativity in Eastern Europe, which until recently was relatively isolated from the world, as being a separate phenomenon, we risk pushing it even further into the world of 'Otherness'. We risk making its 'Otherness' even more evident, even within institutionalized frameworks, since we mostly present ourselves—consciously or not—in the way we believe the Other would want to perceive us. But we would be risking more if we simply forget about its Otherness and presented ourselves in the spirit of the newly united Europe—as being equal, and if we pointed to those cultural-historical characteristics which comply with the popular slogan that we have always been part of Europe.[36]

Ukraine, as a former communist country continually negotiating how to address this past, produces a unique socio-political context for and shaped by its citizens. It is the tumultuousness of this context that drives destruction both for the artist and those opposing the artwork. By focusing on the specificities and contradictions within this context and how the artists engage these conditions with creativity and wit, I hope to avoid the fetishistic drive to highlight the dark and 'unthinkable' corners of Ukrainian society that lure in their difference from the West.

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[36] Zdenka Badinovac, "Body in the East", in *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe* edited by Phoebe Adler and Duncan McCorquodale, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 212.

Simultaneously, I have strived to avoid romantic, nationalistic, and idealistic depictions of Ukraine perpetuated in some Ukrainian-Canadian discourses. Like most countries, Ukraine is both and neither.

The study of destruction is key in this methodology as I argue that destruction in art does not annihilate or oppress, but rather creates space in oppressive, dysfunctional, and challenging conditions for a different reality to be realized. Ukraine is particularly well versed in this dynamic of destroying old orders and I aim to study the art produced after the latest of these upheavals, the Euromaidan Protests, within Ukraine as a country that is itself. Ukraine is an old-new country, a post-Soviet country, an Eastern European country, a state with disputed territories, where citizens fight for agency in the face of endemic corruption, where many of my relatives live, where my new friends create art, run museums, and organize protests—a country, a group of people, a place. My research emphasizes how these individuals navigate a dynamic socio-political context with creativity, cutting wit, and perseverance. Although I will be discussing hardships faced by the Ukrainian population, specifically women, I hope that by emphasizing artwork and artists I am switching the lens to "investigating the strengths and strategies that allow communities and individuals to survive marginalization".[37] I want to feature how individuals not just survive, but fight back, respond powerfully, and forge sites to thrive—artwork is one of these sites.

[37] Strega and Brown, "From Resistance to Resurgence", 5.

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter explores Maria Kulikovska's video performance *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* (2019) as a response to the destruction of her sculpture series *Army of Clones* (2010-2014) and *Homo Bulla* (2012-2014). My analysis of *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* is informed by my interview with Kulikovska where our conversation waded into family histories, identity politics, and the cathartic potential of feminism for individuals. I contextualize the artwork with a discussion of the geopolitical implications of the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas on Kulikovska personally—a key component of the video performance. Informed by the context and Kulikovska's reflections on conflict, exile, and feminism, I explore how the re-enactive component of the video performance allows viewers to become submerged in the narrative and form their own memory of this art-event. The incorporation of destruction within the artworks highlights the instability of subject positions and power, transforming the subject of the survivor into a resilient and resistant figure.

The second chapter offers a continuation of the theme of destruction against the image of the female nude; however, in this instance operating within the context of protest and far-right nationalism. This chapter explores the interplay between two banners created by artist Dana Kavelina for March 8th demonstrations in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, Kavelina created a banner painted with a naked female body being attacked by various symbolic objects. This banner was destroyed by far-right counter protesters who arrived at the demonstration and deemed the banner offensive. In response, Kavelina created another banner for the subsequent March 8th demonstrations in 2019 once again featuring a naked female body, but this figure demonstrates the impact of oppressive ideological forces upon a decrepit body. Through the interplay of these banners, I explore how Kavelina has chosen to depict the female body as monstrous and suffering,

subject to the proliferation of nationalism and militarism in Ukrainian society. By analyzing the banner exhibited in the streets and supported by the bodies of other participants in the march, I suggest that the banner implicates the public in determining whether the woman must continue to be subjected to this fate.

The third chapter analyzes an artwork that employs destruction as part of a performance-based practise and implicates the body of the artist in visible and invisible forms. In her work *Self-Portrait,* artist Valentyna Petrova destroys a tapestry she embroidered, refusing to leave an art object left at the end of the performance. I situate *Self-Portrait* within a history of instances where women turned to textiles as economic and emotional survival mechanisms in Ukraine and the discourse on textile praxis emerging alongside feminist theories. Petrova emphasizes how the medium of embroidery can be used to explore individual emotions, thoughts, and anxieties in the face of various external pressures by destroying her own work and an image of herself through a performance-based activity. Her physical interaction with embroidery emphasizes the labour required to create and destroy an artwork and links Petrova in solidarity with textile labourers and others turning to embroidery for economic means. The act of destruction critiques these economic systems by refusing to leave an art object at the end of the performance that can be incorporated into the market.

The three artworks featured across the chapters coalesce in their entanglements with several themes that enrich and broaden conceptualizations of feminism in the contemporary Ukrainian context. Working off Zychowicz's argument that feminisms in Ukraine defy stable definitions, are subjectively realized, and often signal larger human rights issues, I have found that feminisms function as a critical tool for individuals to problematize and deconstruct the world they

live in, opening up space for alternative possibilities.[38] Feminisms declare "it does not have to be this way". Kulikovska's, Kavelina's, and Petrova's artworks address complex histories while highlighting pressing concerns such as nationalism and national identity, increasing militarism, trauma, the far-right, the labouring body and the labourer, gender roles, and representations of the female body.

Kulikovska's, Kavelina's, and Petrova's artworks are performance-based and consist of a single action contingent upon spatial and temporal parameters for their exhibition. As examples of destruction art, they are ephemeral and situated, unable to be recreated or their meanings change significantly. My analyses of the artworks are predicated on the documentation of their performances in the form of videos, photographs, description by the artists, and accounts of individuals who did witness the performances. Similarly, the destructive acts these works respond to could not have been predicted or recorded in comprehensive videos or photographs. I have relied on second-hand accounts from the artists, news sources, or other individuals present during these events to inform my research. Taken together, these diverse sources come together to weave stories around the artworks, giving life to the traces they have left behind.

Feminist artists in Ukraine are creating subjective narratives of the tumultuous period that followed the Revolution of Dignity through diverse embodied artistic practises. They operate in conditions characterized by an ongoing, destructive war that has displaced millions and killed over 10,000, destabilized the economy, and psychologically traumatized those on all sides of the conflict. Feminist and LGBTQIA+ activists face violence from far-right groups that have fed on growing nationalism and militarism in Ukrainian society, attacking opposition in the name of

[38] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 24-25.

"Ukrainian traditions". Kulikovska, Kavelina, and Petrova navigate conditions of destruction and recognize that these conditions also oppress many racially, sexually, denominationally, and generationally other than themselves. Their artworks channel the destructive energy prevalent in Ukrainian society, physically exerted towards their artworks and turn it against the discriminatory and oppressive patriarchal systems in place. They transform destruction into a productive force that creates space in the representational confines of the artwork to envision alternative, emancipatory realities.

Chapter 1

Producing Feminist Discourses in the Debris of Destruction: Maria Kulikovska's Response to Conflict in *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten*

The Ukrainian-Crimean artist Maria Kulikovska stands naked, armed with a rifle. She proceeds to walk slowly through a lush forest, accompanied by a distant cacophonous soundtrack, when something in the distance catches her eye. Kulikovska crouches to the ground, raises her rifle, and shoots three times. Through a dissipating haze, sculptures of nude female figures with fatal gunshot wounds to the head, neck, and chest become visible. As Kulikovska stands amongst these sculptures, made of ballistic soap, it becomes clear that they have been cast from her own body.[39] What would motivate Kulikovska to shoot her own sculptures; to destroy representations of herself? And what is the purpose of the surreal narrative in her video-performance *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* (2019) in which these sculptures appear?[40]

Kulikovska's video performance responds to an earlier event, one that she both remembers and reshapes for political purposes. Two of Kulikovska's prior sculpture series—*Army of Clones* (2010-2014) and *Homo Bulla* (2012-2014)—were exhibited on the premises of Izolyatsia: Platform for Cultural Initiatives in Donetsk, Ukraine before war erupted in the region.[41] *Army of Clones* consisted of gypsum sculptures cast from Kulikovska's naked body that

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[39] Ballistic soap is a medium that simulates human flesh often used to test the power and velocity of firearms and other lethal weapons.

[40] I use the term video-performance to refer to *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* following Kulikovska's own terminology on her website. Kulikovska characterizes her performances as "based on her interaction with her sculptural objects, as well as on the artist's observations of transformation, fragility, and sometimes on their acceleration of their destruction by her body". The term video-performance acknowledges both these live interactions and the documentation of these interactions as the work itself.
"Performance", *MariaKulikovska.net,* accessed July 25, 2020, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/performance.

[41] *Homo Bulla* is a Latin phrase coined by Roman writer Marcus Terentius Varro which translates as "man is a bubble".
Olena Chervonik, "Homo Bulla: Human as Soap Bubble 2012-2014", *MariaKulikovska.net,* summer 2012, accessed September 29, 2019, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/homo-bulla.

were left outside to endure the effects of the weather.[42] *Homo Bulla* consisted of ballistic soap casts of Kulikovska's naked body, displayed amongst the crumbling industrial architecture located on the premises of the art centre.[43] *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* recalls the moment when the sculptures composing the two series were "executed" by separatist forces as the region was occupied and declared the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in 2014.[44]

[42] "Army of Clones, 2010-2014" *Mariakulikovska.net,* accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/army-of-clones.
[43] Chervonik, "Homo Bulla", https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/homo-bulla.
[44] "Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten", *Mariakulikovska.net,* accessed September 25, 2019, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/let-me-say-it-is-not-forgotten.
Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten is the most recent of several works that address the "execution" of Kulikovska's sculptures. In 2015 Kulikovska destroyed ballistic soap casts of her body in the Saatchi Gallery, London with a hammer, composing the piece *Happy Birthday* and *Homo Bulla Replica.* The following year she was invited to open a solo exhibition in London by the British cultural organization Art Represent. Her exhibition entitled *9th of May. Victory Day* featured the sculptures she had beaten with a hammer except she doused one of the sculptures in blood. See Maria Kulikovska, "Happy Birthday 2015", *Mariakulikovska.net, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/happy-birthday;* Maria Kulikovska, "9th of May, 2016", *Mariakulikovska.net, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/9th-of-may.*

Figure 1.1 Maria Kulikovska, Army of Clones, 2010-2014, Gypsum Sculpture, formerly exhibited at Izolyatsia: Platform for Cultural Initiatives, Donetsk, Ukraine, image courtesy of Kulikovska's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/army-of-clones.

In 2014 a devastating and ongoing war erupted in Eastern Ukraine. Military forces from the DPR co-opted Izolyatsia, turning it into a prison, and destroyed any trace of its former occupants in the process.[45] Kulikovska's sculptures were fired upon by militants who described

[45] Maria Kulikovska, "Autonomous Republic of Maria Kulikovska", *Mariakulikovska.net*, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/autonomous-republic-maria-kulikovska;
On June 9, 2014 Izolyatsia was seized by militants from the DPR. The premises were looted and vandalized, and despite appeals by the organization to remove archives and artworks from the territory, these pleas were denied. The former cultural centre continues to be used by the DPR to train militants and detain individuals.
See "Izolyatsia in Exile", *Izolyatsia: Platform for Cultural Initiatives*, updated 2019, https://izolyatsia.org/en/foundation/exile/.

the activity as a "performance-shooting" intended to emphasize the consequences to "a woman, who disobeys moral values and rules of the self-proclaimed republic".[46] Shooting Kulikovska's sculptures functioned as a violent seizure of political, social, and cultural power by the DPR militants, aimed at erasing any aspects of society they deemed undesirable or threatening. The untimely destruction of Kulikovska's sculptures without her volition suggests that DPR forces were not only attacking her artwork, but her position as an outspoken and critical female artist.

At present, all that remains of the original gypsum sculptures composing *Army of Clones* and the ballistic soap sculptures composing *Homo Bulla* are a series of photographs captured by staff from Izolyatsia.[47] These documents were created over several years and capture how the sculptures from both series gradually decayed when left exposed to the elements. The photographs of *Army of Clones* document how the medium of gypsum disintegrated; in some instances, the sculptures lost their structural integrity and lay amputated, decapitated, and truncated on the ground. The sculptures composing *Homo Bulla* demonstrated their decay through a different process; the surface of their bodies began to erode first, bubbling, peeling, cracking, only then caving in and separating at the seams while remaining standing amongst crumbling cement enduring a similar fate. These sculptures initially strike an uncanny

[46] Kulikovska, "Autonomous Republic of Maria Kulikovska".
[47] "Army of Clones, 2010-2014"; Olena Chervonik, "Homo Bulla".

resemblance to one another, casted in multiples from the female body of artist Kulikovska, but they morph into individuals as they stand exposed and weather at their own pace.[48]

Figure 1.2 Maria Kulikovska, Homo Bulla: Human as Soap Bubble, 2012-2014, Ballistic Soap Sculpture, formerly exhibited at Izolyatsia: Platform for Cultural Initiatives, Donetsk, Ukraine, image courtesy of Kulikovska's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/homo-bulla.

Created exactly five years after these sculptures were shot by DPR forces, *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* functions as both a response and commemoration to the shooting of these sculptures. Kulikovska shapes the video performance in this manner by replicating the act of destruction that occurred against her volition by her own hand. The gunfire directed towards her sculptures as an ideological statement by the DPR militants stands contrast her own engagement

[48] "Army of Clones, 2010-2014"; Olena Chervonik, "Homo Bulla".

with destruction as an artistic strategy. Within the context of the performance-based work *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten,* or the gradual weathering and disintegration of the sculptures composing *Army of Clones* and *Homo Bulla*, Kulikovska demonstrates how artists can explore various strategies and dimensions of the destructive act. This juxtaposition illustrates the difference between intentional and non-intentional destruction of contemporary art in Ukraine and the politics inherent in these processes. The act of destruction can be co-opted and transformed to various ends in defiance of non-intentional forms of destruction directed towards artworks and citizens, as will be illustrated with an analysis of the video-performance in this chapter. By channeling destructive energy in a responsive capacity, Kulikovska allows viewers to witness this moment deeply embedded in her personal life, and by extension the lives of many citizens continuously experiencing the effects of war.

The relationship between the "execution" of Kulikovska's sculptures by DPR forces and her co-opting of the means of destruction within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* visualizes the interplay of memory, power, and gender during a period of conflict. I suggest that memory and narrative are important considerations when exploring artwork created in a context where the artist is deeply intertwined and effected by political turbulence. I demonstrate this by analyzing Kulikovska's video performance alongside interviews with the artist herself, her biography, and personal essays. I argue that within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* Kulikovska articulates a feminist position that centres upon the navigation and subversion of power relations by expanding upon the subject of the survivor and what can be gleaned from the creative ways one survives in the face of adversity.[49] Her interpretation of feminism is rooted within the dynamics

[49] The term survivor is often used in reference to sexual assault and rape within feminist discourse; however, it has also been employed more broadly in reference to surviving cancer, surviving genocide such as the Holocaust and Residential Schools, or political imprisonment such as surviving the GULAG. Studies of war-torn regions often use

of memory—how events are recollected and how the strength of previous generations informs the present. It is emphasized by the clever ways Kulikovska reinterprets destruction in relation to the ever-shifting power dynamics that allow survivors to resist and reshape their realities. In employing destruction and repetition within her work, Kulikovska rejects the purely oppressive connotation of destruction and suggests that it produces a space to re-envision and re-construct the past, present, and future from the debris.

The Trials and Tribulations of Making Sense of War

Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten illustrates Maria Kulikovska's subjective response to political events that have transpired in Ukraine and continue to affect its citizens in significant ways. Following the ousting of former president Victor Yanukovych—largely considered a pro-Russian president whose Party of Regions had a stronghold in Eastern Ukraine—during the most violent days of the Revolution of Dignity, tensions within the Ukrainian population and between Russia and Ukraine led to ongoing armed conflict.[50] Beginning in late February 2014 with the

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the term more broadly to reference the various traumas including bombings, chemical attacks, mass-killings, deportation, displacement, imprisonment, sexual violence, and loss faced by individuals who have lived in war zones. One example among many being Karin Mlodoch's study of Kurdish women survivor's in Iraq ""We Want to be Remembered as Strong Women, Not as Shepherds" Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq Struggling for Agency and Acknowledgement". In the Ukrainian context, the concept of surviving has been studied by Oksana Kis' in her research on women survivors of the GULAG prison system, "Українки в гулагу: вижити значить перемогти" [Ukrainian women in the Gulag: to survive means to overcome] and Cathy Friesen's book *Silence was Salvation: Child Survivor's of Stalin's Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union.* I use the term survivor in reference to this broader definition that focuses upon surviving political turbulence, oppression, and war.
Karin Mlodoch, ""We Want to be Remembered as Strong Women, Not as Shepherds" Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq Struggling for Agency and Acknowledgement", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 8, 1 (2012): 63-91.
Cathy Friesen, *Silence was Salvation: Child Survivor's of Stalin's Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
Oksana Kis, "Українки в гулагу: вижити значить перемогти" [Ukrainian women in the Gulag: to survive means to overcome], (L'viv: National Academy of Ukraine, Institute of Ethnography, 2017).
[50] Ivan Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbas: A Violent Break-up of Ukraine?", *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 4 (2016): 479.

help of trained military personnel, Russia began its annexation of Crimea, a peninsula located on the Black Sea and at the time the southernmost region of Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea was followed in March 2014 by armed and unarmed separatists seizing control of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine.[51] Although Russia did not initially have an official and armed military presence in the Donbas region, it supported the separatists by supplying weapons, volunteers, training, and refuge to militants in Russia.[52] These events culminated in the displacement of roughly three million refugees from Crimea and the Donbas region, both internally and within neighbouring countries.[53] Kulikovska is one of these internally displaced individuals, now residing in Kyiv, banned from returning to her home of Kerch on the Crimean Peninsula following its annexation by Russia.[54]

The annexation of Crimea significantly affected the personal life and work of Kulikovska as it created an environment rife with brutality, censorship, and propaganda where dissidence is not tolerated. Russia justified the annexation as a means to protect ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living in Crimea from allegedly mounting Ukrainian and Islamic terrorism in the region following the ousting of President Yanukovych.[55] Russian political leaders were frustrated that they had lost Yanukovych as an ally, and viewed annexation as a "returning" of Crimea to a greater Russian state reminiscent of the power it held during the Soviet Union and Russian Empire.[56] The polarizing narratives employed by Russian President Vladimir Putin to justify

[51] Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbas", 479.
[52] Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbas", 480.
[53] Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbas", 474.
[54] Maria Kulikovska, Interview with Kalyna Somchynsky, Kyiv, Ukraine, August 22, 2019.
[55] Halyna Coynash and Austin Charron, "Russian-occupied Crimea and the state of exception: repression, persecution, and human rights abuses", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 60, no. 1 (2019): 29.
[56] By annexing Crimea, Russia guaranteed that Ukraine remained out of NATO and the European Union as these organizations would not accept member states with active conflicts on their territories. The process of annexation began on February 27, 2014 when soldiers in unmarked uniforms appeared on the streets and took over major governmental institutions. They organized a referendum—deemed unconstitutional by the Ukrainian law and

annexation and the war in Ukraine's East combine populism, nationalism, and imperialism to create an "us" vs "them" binary, which Tipaldou and Casula have pointed out is complicated when considering the history of Ukraine and Russia.[57] They argue that "the image of an 'antagonistic Other' is blurred and the Other somehow belongs to the self" when considering the colonial and imperial relationship of Ukraine and Russia as Ukraine was historically part of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.[58] In Putin's speeches regarding the annexation of Crimea, he has painted Ukraine both as an enemy composed of Ukrainian nationalists and corrupt governments who fail to look after their people while also describing the "brotherly" relationship between the two countries and their close relationships throughout history.[59] Imperial rhetoric shrouded in narratives of pan-Slavic brotherhood have been employed by Putin to reduce differences between Ukrainians and Russians; however, when tensions become unsurmountable Ukraine becomes the "antagonistic Other" once again.[60] Analyses such as Tipaldou and Casula's emphasize that understanding the tensions between Ukraine and Russia and within Ukraine itself cannot be achieved by employing a binary framework of ahistorical reductionism and that relationships between groups are complicated, fragmented, and historically contingent.

Maintaining the critical tone of Tipaldou and Casula's argument, many scholars have turned their attention to the arts as a platform that captures the complex nature of war and

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condemned by the UN—on March 16, 2014 and independence from Ukraine and accession to Russia was declared on March 18, 2014.
Serhiy Yekelchyk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4-5.

[57] Sofia Tipaldou and Philipp Casula, "Russian Nationalism Shifting: The Role of Populism Since the Annexation of Crimea", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 27, no. 3 (2019): 352-354.

[58] Tipaldou and Casula, "Russian Nationalism Shifting", 352-354.

[59] Tipaldou and Casula, "Russian Nationalism Shifting", 359-362.

[60] Tipaldou and Casula, "Russian Nationalism Shifting", 352-354.

identity politics.[61] For example, Yuliya Ilchuk analyzes art and literature produced in the Donbas following the rise of separatism in order to present the complex history of the region without fostering antagonisms.[62] Jessica Zychowicz has chronicled her experiences participating in the Donbas Studies Summer School (2019) that took place in the formerly occupied cities of Lysychansk and Severodonetsk—an initiative aimed at exploring the cultural potential of formerly industrial cities.[63] Zychowicz argues in her book *Superfluous Women: Feminism, Art, and Revolution in Twenty-First Century Ukraine* (2020) that the arts engage an alternative medium to fracture grand narratives of allegiance and open other possibilities to understand Ukraine.[64] These studies provide a refreshing contrast to recent trends in academia elaborated on by Darya Malyutina. She argues that relationships between scholars both in Ukraine and internationally have become strained following the outbreak of war as debates frequently become ideologically charged, adapt patriotic tones, and become framed in terms such as left/right, victory/betrayal, pro-Ukrainian/pro-Russian.[65] Focusing on the arts compliments and complicates quantitative sociological studies such as surveys that gauge the affiliation and identities of

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[61] Yuliya Ilchuk, "Hearing the voice of Donbas: art and literature as forms of cultural protest during the war", *Nationalities Papers* 45, 2 (2017): 256-273; Natalia Humeniuk, "«Я 350 разів вибачалась за всіх міністрів соцполітики перед персіонерками в Бахмуті»--художника Алевтина Кахідзе", ["350 times I've apologized on behalf of the social policy ministers in front of the seniors in Bakhmut"-artist Alevtina Kakhidze], *Hromadske.ua*, October 31, 2019, https://hromadske.ua/posts/ya-350-raziv-vibachalas-za-vsih-ministriv-socpolitiki-pered-pensionerkami-v-bahmuti-hudozhnicya-alevtina-kahidze?fbclid=iwar2z-q9mnsmzphrpahlcjtd2ism3n-0stpwwkxa0fnodg3tdf0fpnockasu; Halyna Braylovskaya, "Новий фільм «Забуті» перший раз покажуть на Варшавському Міжнародному Кінофестивалі" [The new film "Forgotten" was shown for the first time at the Warsaw International Filmfestival], *Be-inart.com,* http://be-inart.com/post/view/3364; Jessica Zychowicz, "To Walk The Line While (Re)Drawing It: Aesthetic-Political Transformation in Formerly Occupied Eastern Ukraine", *donbasstudies.org,* June 24-July 2, 2019, https://donbasstudies.org/en/jessica-zychowicz/?fbclid=IwAR2Vcwpx63YREjqZ-SbjMCMmJbGBIOFeav0u0NjaOGZS2vBOoifiOaFfH4s.

[62] Yuliya Ilchuk, "Hearing the voice of Donbas", 256-257.

[63] Jessica Zychowicz, "To Walk The Line While (Re)Drawing It: Aesthetic-Political Transformation in Formerly Occupied Eastern Ukraine", *donbasstudies.org,* June 24-July 2, 2019, https://donbasstudies.org/en/jessica-zychowicz/?fbclid=IwAR2Vcwpx63YREjqZ-SbjMCMmJbGBIOFeav0u0NjaOGZS2vBOoifiOaFfH4s.

[64] Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women: Feminism, Art, and Revolution in Twenty First Century Ukraine,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 384-385.

[65] Darya Malyutina, "The Impact of the Armed Conflict in the East of Ukraine on Relations Among Scholars of Ukraine Across Europe", *TOPOS: Journal For Philosophy and Cultural Studies* 2, (2018): 110.

residents of the Donbas to Ukraine, Russia, or both along civic, linguistic, or religious parameters, similarly suggesting clear markers of identity that are more nuanced in reality.[66] The arts provide a powerful contribution to the discourse on the war in Ukraine as they privilege and humanize the complex reality of those living in conflict.

My research into contemporary feminist art in Ukraine contributes to the aforementioned discourse by taking the artwork as my central focus. Rooted in the discipline of art history, I analyse the interplay of the formal elements composing artworks in relation to the contexts the artworks function within and the artists' biographies. In my exploration of Kulikovska's work through this lens, I can determine how *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* responds to the war in the Donbas and annexation of Crimea in ways beyond what Kulikovska may have intended. By suggesting that the artwork is a semi-autonomous cultural product—created by the artist but open to various interpretations—my analysis lingers in the messiness of social, political, and economic forces, defying binary understandings.[67] Synthesizing my interpretations with Kulikovska's story as an individual subject to the instability of contemporary Ukraine, *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* makes the effects of the conflict both visible and audible in partial, individual, accounts.

Kulikovska's work is situated within a growing artistic discourse led by artists from the occupied territories who intertwine critique with subjectivity and lived experience. This tendency is illustrated by artist Alevtina Khakhidze who produced drawings of her mother's experience

[66] See Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbas" and Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner, "War and identity: the case of the Donbas in Ukraine", *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no 2-3 (2018): 139-157.

[67] The analysis and critique of binary frameworks has become a common practise in feminist theory that emerged in the work of Donna Haraway. See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Manifestly Haraway*, 3-90, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

living in Zhdanivka in the conflict zone—Khakhidze's mother died while waiting in line to receive her pension—and the struggles of seniors who had decided not to leave this territory for various reasons.[68] In her work, Kakhidze addresses what she describes as the structural violence of how ordinary people become casualties of war through poor access to resources, such as the long travels and lengthy queues seniors must endure in order to acquire their meagre pensions from the Ukrainian government.[69] Within literature, the poet Olena Stepova compiled a series of prose entitled *podslushki* or 'eavesdrops', initially published on Facebook, where she chronicled the nuanced relationships between individuals and atrocities occurring in the occupied territories based on personal and overheard conversations.[70] Kulikovska's work contributes to this discourse by providing a subjective, partial, and humanizing perspective on the effects of war and displacement that draws on her own personal experience as an artist in exile and enemy of the (il)legitimate states of Crimea, The Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics, and Russia.

Recalling Feminist Origin Stories and Contextualized Resistance

On a hot summer evening in late August 2019, I sat with Maria Kulikovska on the terrace of a café in Kyiv's historical centre. Through our casual conversation, Kulikovska recalled how various political tensions within Ukrainian history have made her and her family subject to strenuous conditions beyond their control. She explained that she has been significantly impacted by the annexation of Crimea by Russian forces in 2014 and considers herself a Ukrainian-

[68] Humeniuk. "«Я 350 разів вибачалась за всіх міністрів соцполітики перед персіонерками в Бахмуті»--художника Алевтина Кахідзе", ["350 times I've apologized on behalf of the social policy ministers in front of the seniors in Bakhmut"-artist Alevtina Kakhidze].
For a detailed analysis of Kakhidze's artworks see Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* chapter 5.
[69] Humeniuk. "«Я 350 разів вибачалась за всіх міністрів соцполітики перед персіонерками в Бахмуті»--художника Алевтина Кахідзе" ["350 times I've apologized on behalf of the social policy ministers in front of the seniors in Bakhmut"-artist Alevtina Kakhidze].
[70] Ilchuk, "Hearing the voice of Donbas", 260-261.

Crimean artist in exile.[71] As a result of being an outspoken, critical, female artist engaging in feminist and LGBTQIA+ issues, Kulikovska is listed a terrorist and person dangerous to society within Crimea, a "degenerate and forbidden artist" in the self proclaimed Donetsk Peoples' Republic, and banned from Russia.[72] In her interview with Jessica Zychowicz and Juliet Jacques, Kulikovska described how she is forbidden from returning to Crimea due to a performance she enacted with Swedish artist Jacqueline Shabo. Kulikovska and Shabo collaborated and wed in a legal same-sex marriage ceremony as art performance in response to various bills tabled by the Yanukovych regime in 2013 such as a law to prevent the spread of positive information about homosexuality.[73] In Crimea, Kulikovska is subject to Russia's homophobic laws restricting homosexual propaganda that transferred to Crimea upon annexation and prevent her from returning home.[74] She has been physically displaced by political powerplays and symbolically told she should not occupy space, not exist, through the shooting of her sculptures. These events left Kulikovska feeling conflicted about her identity as a Ukrainian citizen not protected or supported by the government. However, as our conversation continued, she stated her determination to persevere in creating positive, creative spaces for critical engagement within Ukraine.[75]

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[71] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.
[72] Maria Kulikovska, "Autonomous Republic of Maria Kulikovska".
[73] Juliet Jacques, interview with Jessica Zychowicz and Maria Kulikovska, "Reimagining Utopias: Art and Politics in 21st Century Ukraine", for *SUITE 212,* Izolyatsia Cultural Platform, Kyiv, 2019, https://soundcloud.com/suite-212/reimagining-utopias-art-and-politics-in-21st-century-ukraine.
[74] Jacques, interview with Zychowicz and Kulikovska, "Reimagining Utopias".
[75] For example, Kulikovska has created the organization "School for Political Performance" and is working with her partner Uleg Vinnichenko to build a space entitled Garage 33 for the collection of contemporary Ukrainian art and an art space for artists working with and in sites of "conflict?".
Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.
Garage 33 Gallery-Shelter (garage33.gallery.shelter), Instagram, accessed July 25, 2020.

Kulikovska credited her rebellious spirit to her upbringing and dwelled on her family history throughout our interview. Our conversations centered around Kulikovska's feelings of displacement and the tensions surrounding her identity. In them, she drew parallels to her parents' and grandparents' experiences of hardship while they were subject to tumultuous political conditions of the twentieth century. She explained how her maternal grandparents were Ukrainian dissidents, who under threat of violence, boarded a train in Western Ukraine in 1956 and disembarked at the end of its route, settling in Kerch, Crimea. Her paternal grandparents similarly suffered during the seemingly unending years of political unrest and totalitarianism in the former Soviet Union. Her grandfather was a Bulgarian nationalist critical of the Soviet Union who spent time in the GULAG and died under Stalin's regime.[76] By connecting the present to a lineage of facing and overcoming hardship, Kulikovska implicates the past in shaping how she addresses being exiled for her artistic-political beliefs and actions in the present. Recollecting her impressions of family history is a powerful component of Kulikovska's feminist position as it identifies ways that individuals defied systems of oppression in ways that were available to them. Her articulation of feminism is rooted in lived experience and transmission of knowledge within a particular context and informs a feminist position that is subjective, multiple, and localized to the experience of everyday Ukrainians.

The root of feminism in personal experience was a common thread amongst the stories individuals shared with me during our conversations in Ukraine.[77] When I asked Kulikovska about what feminism meant to her, she drew on the actions of her grandmother and mother in

[76] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.
[77] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky in Kyiv; Oleksandra Kushchenko, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky in L'viv, Ukraine on September 3, 2019; Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky in L'viv, Ukraine on September 1, 2019; Oksana Briukhovetska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky in Kyiv, Ukraine on September 6, 2019.

shaping how she came to understand her position as a woman in Ukrainian society. She tenderly described her grandmother in our conversation:

> My grandmother lost her husband very early…she had three children, she was alone, and she needed to be strong. I think she is the best example of a true feminist. Kind, intelligent, sensitive, beautiful, strong, powerful, influenced…She is goddess…I always looked at her like the biggest person in the world. She was the example of how I would love to be. I didn't know that I was growing by feminist. But she was building me up like a feminist.[78]

She emphasized how her grandmother's strength and her mother's ability to step into the traditional male role of generating the primary income as her father struggled with depression illustrated relationships based on equality and care.[79] She explained that her grandmother always told her to value education, be able to support herself, and not to marry young as women need to be fully formed individuals before entering into marriage.[80] Although her relatives may not have referred to themselves as feminists, they instilled values in Kulikovska that she has internalized as evidence of a feminist sensibility. The lessons learned by older generations and the way their actions have demonstrated strength and resilience were paramount in grounding Kulikovska's interpretation of feminism.

The interpretation of feminism articulated by Kulikovska within her interview and her artwork sits in conversation with the discourse on post-socialist and post-Soviet feminisms. Kulikovska's perspective resonates with Zychowicz's and Swedish-Estonian researcher Redi Koobak's articulations of feminisms in their own research in Ukraine and Estonia respectively. Both scholars explore localized feminist positions within the lives and experiences of women, particularly artists and activists, through years of personal interviews and relationship building.[81]

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[78] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.
[79] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.
[80] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.
[81] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 16-17; Redi Koobak, "Narrating Feminisms: what do we talk about when we talk about feminism in Estonia", *Gender, Place, and Culture* 25, 7 (2018): 1012.

Working within the interplay of transnational and decolonial feminist studies, they focus on local dynamics to counter the urge to compare events within their respective post-Soviet contexts to Western definitions of feminism.[82] This attention to an experiential feminism as articulated by Kulikovska similarly disrupts discourses that analyze post-Soviet feminisms in comparison with Western feminisms that position post-Soviet nations as 'catching up'.[83] Instead, Kulikovska's articulation of feminism is "rooted in geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge, to know local politics of feminism".[84] It is a feminism located in stories and memories that pushes how we can define feminisms outside a dominant Western paradigm.

My impressions of feminist stories in Ukraine resonates with Redi Koobak and Zychowicz's experiences conducting interviews with women in Estonia and Ukraine. Zychowicz notes that she has "encountered "feminism" as a signified of borderlands, a useful heuristic, and…a "red flag" with which to index a range of debates involving theories of democracy, civil rights, economics, and violence".[85] Furthermore, Koobak as an Estonian born woman living and educated in Sweden, noted that speaking with her sister who has always lived in Estonia that her sister's "attitude comes across as confident and fiercely feminist"; however, rooted within experience rather than academic literature.[86] Theses interpretations of feminisms informed by practical strategies of navigation and resistance to a patriarchal culture are deeply localized and subjective as they blur the division of theory and practice, insisting that the two are mutually constituted when we listen hard enough.

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[82] Zychowicz, 16-17; Koobak, 1011.
[83] Koobak, "Narrating Feminisms", 1011.
[84] Koobak, "Narrating Feminisms", 1011.
[85] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 17.
[86] Koobak, "Narrating Feminisms", 1010-1011.

The Cacophony of Memory

As the black screen signalling the beginning of *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* dissipates, a subtle soundtrack carries the viewer into the forest where the narrative begins to unfold. The video performance is accompanied by a continuous cacophony of chirping birds, splashing water, twigs breaking underfoot, and the subtle chorus of women's voices. A persistent indiscernible haze undulates within the dynamics of the narrative, enveloping the trees, Kulikovska's body, and the sculptures. These two elements create an air of uncertainty within the video as the viewer watches the action unfold, but similarly, establishes a cyclical quality to the narrative. The sound and floating atmospheric effects are continuous through out the video-performance, ebbing and flowing, as the narrative reaches a climax. When Kulikovska becomes poised to shoot, the disembodied women's chorus crescendos as the haze intensifies. Once Kulikovska pulls the trigger, the screen becomes enveloped in the haze, disorienting the viewer, and encouraging them to wonder whether this is smoke from the gun. The sound of women's voices once again audibly emerges in the soundtrack as the haze or smoke begins to clear and reveals Kulikovska standing amongst her sculptures. The voices fade in and out as the video performance concludes with the haze floating in a clearing between two trees.

The dynamic visual and audible quality of the floating atmospheric haze, dissonant, layered soundtrack, and element of repetition, in addition to the title itself, suggest the interplay of memory within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten*. These elements create a surreal quality to the narrative as the viewer is left trying to discern the audio and visual elements without being able to reach a clear resolution. The recurring elements in the video performance suggest a cyclical temporal element to memory that oscillates between remembering and forgetting, being able to discern and becoming lost in the overlapping sights and sounds. The birds and the mist do not

suggest the passage of time as linear demarcations of past, present, future, but rather collapse time suggesting that the past, present, and future are bound into one another within the realm of memory. The continual sound of birds and sight of mist are circular elements within the form of the video that provide a setting for the narrative to take place while remaining present as the action changes. They index an ever present past that cannot be escaped or forgotten. Even within the recesses of memory, the past and present collapse into one another as evidenced by the re-enactive quality of the video-performance: the video performance makes explicit the implicit experience of the past being re-lived and encountered continually.

Figure 1.3 Maria Kulikovska, Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten, 2019, Video Performance, Still, full video available on artist's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/let-me-say-it-is-not-forgotten.

Kulikovska continually engages with the past as she produces a video performance founded on the principles of recreation and repetition.[87] Connecting Kulikovska's intimate

[87] The repetition of an act or gesture multiple times has been associated with trauma and the desire to gain mastery in psychoanalytic theory. Freud asserts this hypothesis in his text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* through analyzing a child continually throwing a toy out of his sight only to joyfully retrieve it a short time later. He observes that the child also expresses these emotions when his mother leaves for a short time and returns. The dynamic of unpleasure and pleasure simulated through the game have been analyzed by Freud as "there are ways

relationship to the destruction of her sculptures and the lineages of conflict experienced by generations of individuals such as Kulikovska's family, the sights and sounds within the setting of the video-performance become indicative of the complex temporal nature of memory.[88] The element of repetition within the structure of the video performance reinforces the cyclical nature of memory as the past is continuously re-enacted and referenced by the presence of Kulikovska and her sculptures. Similarly, the element of repetition is present within the video performance through the ringing out of three shots, and the presence of a series of five female sculptures moulded from Kulikovska's body. The visual repetition of Kulikovska's body creates an uncanny image where the artist stands next to multiples of her body that have been fatally wounded by her own hand.[89]

When I met with Kulikovska, our conversations often drifted into the recollection of memories and reflecting how these moments have shaped our present perspectives. *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* functions as a visual manifestation of this process by re-enacting a formative moment from Kulikovska's past—the execution of her sculptures—drawing on affective recollection and reinterpreting the traumatic event to take it back from the control of DPR

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and means enough of making what is itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind". He continues that "the compulsion to repeat recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed". Similarly, Kulikovska shoots these sculptures, reliving the initial act of trauma, to take the event into her own hands and shape its outcome and affect on her.
Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* trans. James Strachey, (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), 37-42.

[88] Maria Kulikovska, interview with Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.

[89] The uncanny is a sensation triggered by instances where our minds encounter a scenario we have relegated to disbelief, such as the living dead. I take my definition of the uncanny from one of Sigmund Freud's definition proposed in his essay *The Uncanny*. Freud proposes that the uncanny can arise "in connection with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish fulfillments, secret power to do harm, and the return of the dead…We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed in the possibility of these things and were convinced that they really happened. Nowadays, we no longer believe in them, we have *surmounted* such ways of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new set of beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon at any confirmation".
Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", translated by Alix Strachey, first published in *Imago,* (1919): 17.

militants. *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* commemorates the moment when Kulikovska's sculptures were shot. It does this by physically recreating this moment; however, this time, with herself behind the scope of the rifle. This act of self-destruction suggests an embodied reliving of the past in order to renegotiate the power inherent in this act and redefine the meaning of those shots.

Turning the rifle on her own sculptures, Kulikovska straddles the subject position of victim and perpetrator, complicating the power dynamics within the initial act of violence by proxy against her body. The video-performance draws on an understanding of power as fluid, articulated by Foucault as:

> understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the processes which through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them.[90]

In other words, power is not a singular, linear force directed unidirectionally. Foucault suggests that there are always several forms of power at play in a single relationship and that these forces are in constant negotiation and renegotiation with one another. Within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten,* Kulikovska shifts the power from the oppressive DPR militants—by re-enacting this moment and by extension the Russian forces who annexed Crimea—and takes control of how the past shapes her present and future. She insists on remembering, reliving this event, and she has the power to decide how it shapes her.

[90] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House Inc., 1990), 92.

Figure 1.4 Maria Kulikovska, Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten, 2019, Video Performance, Still, full video available on artist's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/let-me-say-it-is-not-forgotten.

The discourse on memory across disciplines is immense and within Ukrainian studies memorialization is an increasingly contentious subject.[91] In Ukraine, debate often arises regarding how to remember the history of World War II and the legacies of Ukrainian partisan organizations such as The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalisms (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), remembering revolutions, coming to terms with the Soviet period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and processes of "decommunization".[92] As

[91] I have undertaken research for other projects on the legacy of Stepan Bandera in Ukraine and narratives surrounding the representation of women's work in museums through a case study of the Ukrainian Museum of Canada: Alberta Branch (UMCAB) in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

[92] For further reading on the history of World War II, OUN, and UPA see Jean Paul Himka, "The Lviv Pogrom 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 53, 2-4 (2011): 209-244. David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (New York: Central European University Press, 2007) and Per Anders Rudling, *The OUN, the UPA, and the Holocaust: a study in the*

Kulikovska's work addresses the recreation of a past events through a personal and affective account within the medium of the artwork rather than addressing the construction of official historical narratives, Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory provides a telling lens to explore the power of memory within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten.*

Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory is grounded in the prevalence of mass media and consumer culture, although her argument regarding the experiential power of these mediums can be applied to Kulikovska's artwork in the Ukrainian context. Within her text *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* she defines prosthetic memory as:

> prosthetic memory emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site…in this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history…the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative, but takes on a more personal, deeply felt narrative about a past event through which he or she did not live.[93]

Prosthetic memory refers to the creation of memories that are not necessarily ones own, not related to something one experienced firsthand, but rather mediated through technologies such as television, film, museums, and in this instance, artwork. Because a historical narrative—regardless of the authenticity of its representation—is recreated in an affective, visceral, manner, it allows individuals to form an account of the event and embed it into their own recollections. These events become memorialized as they are recalled and implicitly or explicitly shape how one acts, thinks, or relates to those unlike oneself.[94] *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* is a site with

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*manufacturing of historical myths, (*Pittsburgh: Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2011).
For further reading on remembering the Soviet period and decommunization see Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women.* See chapter 3 and Zychowicz's discussion of Yevgenia Belorusets photo series "32 Gogol Street" and chapters 4 and 5 for a discussion of "decommunization".

[93] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

[94] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory,* 2-3.

the potential to encourage prosthetic memories by recreating an event with space for the viewer to embed themselves within the video performance.

When Kulikovska shoots the casts of her body in the video-performance, she simulates the act of violence by proxy against her own body demonstrated by the DPR forces and presents the impact of this event to a vast audience. Although not physically present when her sculptures were executed, Kulikovska's knowledge of this event and its intense emotional affect that she has continued to relive over and over within her artistic practise has culminated in a memory of the event. The work functions as another layer of memory by recreating this moment to be received by an audience; a prosthetic memory of prosthetic memory of the affects of a memory, where the viewer witnesses Kulikovska's apprehension of this destructive moment. Presenting a narrative representation of these events to an audience who will then form their own prosthetic memory, Kulikovska demonstrates the power of the past in shaping individuals in the present and future, such as she has been shaped by this event. Kulikovska not only draws on the formative nature of the original event for herself as an individual but suggests through the video that this moment has the power to shape audience responses to the devastation of war.

Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten functions as a plea through a subjective account to remember those enduring the seemingly endless powerplay of conflict that has left Kulikovska and many like her displaced and unable to return home. She repeats the event when her sculptures were shot to recall the affects of war, the conditions that have left millions displaced, killed, or left suffering. Through representing this event for various audiences that may engage with her artwork, Kulikovska's video performance has the potential to foster empathy as prosthetic memories are created. Landsberg emphasizes the significance of prosthetic memory as she argues that technologies of representation have ethical potential that contrasts the prevalent

analysis of their role in desensitization and propaganda.[95] She states that "prosthetic memory creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the "other".[96] *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* demonstrates the physical and emotional toll of war through Kulikovska's account and in doing so allows viewers to embroil themselves in the dynamics of conflict and put themselves in her position. While some viewers may recall similar experiences of their own, others may embed this prosthetic memory in the recesses of their mind, shaping how they act in the present and future.

Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten is a site that resituates memory as a form of resistance by visualizing the nuances of memory through the interplay of visual elements and provides viewers with their own prosthetic memory. Just as Kulikovska takes control of the trauma embedded in her past by taking the rifle into her own hands, memories—lived or prosthetic, 'felt' in Landsberg's words—can be refashioned in subjective ways to live better with one another.[97] As memories do not become limited to one's lived experience, they can become appropriated by individuals from various positions to "become the grounds for political alliances and the production of new, counterhegemonic public spheres".[98] In the context of contemporary Ukraine, room for this possibility is significant as opening oneself up to memories that are not one's own allows for individuals to empathize with the suffering of neighbors who are not like oneself. It allows individuals to consider the humanity in suffering, surviving, and rising above in an effort to break down antagonisms, differences, and polarities.

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[95] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory,* 33.
[96] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory,* 9.
[97] Landsberg writes that "while these experiences are not "authentic"—not an "actual" experience of the lived event—they are nevertheless acutely felt".
Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory,* 33.
[98] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory,* 34.

Kulikovska implicates the viewer and allows them to participate in the unfolding narrative through distinct cinematographic choices. When the video-performance begins, the camera follows Kulikovska from behind as she slowly walks through the forest armed with a rifle. The viewer can insert themselves into the scene in alliance with Kulikovska, searching for an unknown target. The position of the viewer then changes as they find themselves facing the barrel of Kulikovska's rifle when three shots ring out and the screen is enveloped in smoke. Just as suddenly as the viewer oscillates from the hunter to the hunted, the perpetrator to the victim, they are divorced from the narrative and apprehend Kulikovska standing among the five sculptures she shot from a distance; however, Kulikovska does not leave the viewer off the hook. She stares at the viewer meeting and challenging their gaze in the final seconds of the video-performance before the camera rests on the space between two trees where the narrative had occurred only moments before. The instances when Kulikovska points her rifle at the viewer and meets their gaze in the video-performance bring the viewer into the narrative as they can no longer only reflect on what they have seen, they have now been seen by Kulikovska and are involved in the action. Their subject position, much like Kulikovska's, oscillates between being shot at by proxy, being posed to shoot, while also being accused of participating in the pattern of violence by Kulikovska's gaze. *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* encourages association between subject positions as the viewer forms a memory of the video-performance from various perspectives within the narrative.

The video-performance encourages a form of empathy that challenges the structures that have led to conditions of suffering rather than merely identifying with the suffering of victims. Megan Boler articulates this important distinction as the difference between passive empathy and testimonial reading. She argues that "passive empathy absolves the reader through the denial of

power relations", by allowing them to apprehend atrocities from a safe distance where the reader or viewer is not implicated in the narrative.[99] In contrast, "rather than seeing reading as isolated acts of individual response to distant others, testimonial reading emphasizes a collective educational responsibility".[100] Testimonial reading, as encouraged in the video performance as a site to form prosthetic memories, challenges the viewer to consider not only the event, but why Kulikovska would shoot her own sculptures. Why are some people considered enemies while others are allies? What conditions allow these distinctions to come into being and how does the viewer either participate in these systems or rebel against them? Active empathy is not limited to the moment the viewer apprehends the video performance but transcends into their actions and interpretations of relationships, power imbalances, and injustices in the realities they encounter.

Just as the café in Kyiv provided Kulikovska and I with a site to reflect on how we are shaped by our pasts, *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* provides a site for viewers to become shaped by Kulikovska's past and reflect on their own. Viewers are invited into in the piece through the fluidity of the gaze within the video-performance, but also through the word 'it' in the title. 'It' remains a signifier without a referent; without knowledge of the commemorative nature of Kulikovska's work, the event that is not forgotten, 'it', can be filled in by the viewer. The viewer can recall elements from their own pasts that continue to impact their present and future. This invitation is further emphasized by the last scene of the video-performance where the camera lingers on the space between two trees. This scene which emphasizes the ongoing presence of the mist and the birds by stripping away firm narrative elements such as Kulikovska armed with a rifle and the executed sculptures, allows a moment of pause and contemplation for the viewer.

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[99] Megan Boler, "The Risks of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism's Gaze", *Cultural Studies* 11, 2 (1997): 261.
[100] Boler, "The Risks of Empathy", 262.

The viewer is invited reflect on their past and the past of Kulikovska, as indicated by the ongoing presence of the mist and the sounds of birds, that they have now embodied into their own memories. They must decide how they will incorporate the past into their future and the future of those they interact with—a future that is open to numerous possibilities.

Figure 1.5 Maria Kulikovska, Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten, 2019, Video Performance, Still, full video available on artist's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/let-me-say-it-is-not-forgotten.

Revelling in the Debris: The Productive Capacity of Destruction

Three shots ring out and the screen becomes enveloped in a cloud of smoke. As the smoke begins to dissipate, the upper body of a nude female sculpture cast in ballistic soap begins to emerge. The sculpture's facial expression is calm, eyes closed, muscles relaxed. The figure is not engaging the viewer, but rather appears lost in her own world, neither refusing the gaze, nor confronting it; she exists as if no one were looking at her. Her arms have been cut off at the shoulder, as if she has witnessed the test of time and felt its effects, sitting in the forest like a

Venus statue from antiquity. The striking peacefulness of the sculpture is disrupted by large round holes protruding from the neck and hip of the body. The edges of the holes are rough with the material that has become displaced from this injury. The sheer scale of these holes suggests fatal wounds and the statue's peacefulness transforms from indifference to death.

The camera pans onto Kulikovska who stands in front of a terracotta coloured sculpture. Kulikovska stands looking out past the camera. Her feet are shoulder width apart and she holds the rifle across her hips. As the camera zooms out from the artist's face, we witness her position among five sculptures all resembling one another; they only differ in the locations of their fatal wounds and colour of the ballistic soap used to cast them. Positioned amongst the sculptures that she has just shot, it becomes evident that Kulikovska and the sculptures share the same facial features and bodily proportions. By standing amongst them, she straddles the distance between victim and perpetrator. In shooting these material sisters is she by extension shooting herself?

Figure 1.6 Maria Kulikovska, Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten, 2019, Video Performance, Still, full video available on artist's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/let-me-say-it-is-not-forgotten.

Kulikovska responds to the original moment when her sculptures were executed by DPR forces by turning this event on its head, harnessing the means of destruction, and turning the gun on her own artwork. Much like the militants, Kulikovska shoots her sculptures as if they are living bodies, aiming at the body parts where a shot would prove immediately fatal. This gesture emphasizes the affective power of destruction, recalling active empathy from the viewer for these sculptures that closely resemble the artist herself. In deploying the power of destruction within her artistic practise, Kulikovska engages in the period of conflict she is inextricably embedded within and harnesses this energy. By embroiling the art object in the forces of destruction, Kulikovska's work sits in conversation with a larger discourse on destruction art.

Destruction art emerged as a tendency within artistic practices following the devastation of World War II, originating with the work of Gustav Metzger and Rafael Montanez Ortiz.[101] Just as Kulikovska implemented destruction into her artistic practice within a tumultuous socio-political context, similarly Metzger, an Orthodox Jew who escaped Nuremburg for England in 1939, wrote his manifestos after studying art and participating in various political actions especially Nuclear Disarmament in the 1950s and 60s.[102] Within his manifestos, Metzger defines Auto-destructive art as "art which contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time".[103] It is an artistic form that is intentionally mortal, dynamic, and temporal and responds to a context where individuals are subject to the power of destruction and unable to harness it. Auto-destructive art gives ordinary citizens, artists, access to the

[101] Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art", *Discourse* 14, 2 (1992): 74.
[102] Elizabeth Fisher, "Gustav Metzger: iconoclasm and interdisciplinarity", *Interdisciplinary Science Review* 42 (2017): 6.
[103] Gustav Metzger, *Manifesto Auto Destructive Art,* March 10, 1960 https://monoskop.org/images/e/ee/Metzger_Gustav_Manifesto_Auto-Destructive_Art_1960.jpg.

capacities of destruction held and employed by governments and militaries leaving citizens subject to its affects.[104] It is an artform that is responsive and empowering as it is simultaneously created and destroyed, mimicking the human condition.

Auto-destructive art and similar destruction art tendencies positioned by Kristine Stiles function as responsive practices, much in the same way as *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten,* to an increasingly militarized, authoritarian, and industrial global socio-political order. They harness the technologies, what I refer to as the means of destruction, employed by governments and militaries against the bodies of citizens within artistic practices situated in contemporary society in order to navigate a context shaped by tensions. These practices embody the tumultuous energy of a historical period and critiques this historical moment simultaneously as "Auto-destructive art re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummelling to which individuals and masses are subjected".[105] Within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten*, Kulikovska takes up arms—the same weapon held by soldiers on either side of the conflict—against casts of her own body transforming these sculptures into enemies by pointing and firing a rifle at their bodies. The absurdity of this act functions as a critique of militarization by suggesting the arbitrary nature by which individuals become victims of war. Similarly, by firing at sculptures created in her own image and standing amongst them following the execution, Kulikovska questions what separates the victim and the perpetrator, and suggests the possibility that one can be either depending on the context. *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* encourages an identifying device across the divide of "us" vs. "them" by drawing on the aesthetic resemblance of the victim and perpetrator, the

[104] Gustav Metzger, *Manifesto Auto Destructive Art.*
[105] Gustav Metzger, *Manifesto Auto Destructive Art.*

sculptures and Kulikovska, suggesting that the viewer look for commonalities over differences in a context of ongoing conflict.

The proposition to look for common humanity in difference engages another component of testimonial reading as proposed by Boler that both brings the viewer and the subject of the artwork closer together and further apart. She proposes that testimonial reading "pushes us to recognize that a novel [or artwork] reflects not merely a distant other, but analogous social relations in our own environment, in which our economic and social positions are implicated".[106] Apprehending the video-performance, or any form of media, requires that the viewer consider how they are embedded within dynamics of power and systems of oppression and domination. It does not collapse the subject of the artwork and the viewer, nor the victim and perpetrator, but considers their common vulnerability within social dynamics that are not static. Simultaneously, testimonial reading places the viewer as an agent with the power to choose how to engage difference in the present. In the context of Kulikovska's video performance, the viewer could be somebody closely effected by the war like Kulikovska, living its realities, or someone completely separated from the context. In either case, she implicates the viewer in the narrative with the capacity to choose how to act and respond to injustice.

Kulikovska poses viewers with a challenge as she stares at the camera in the final seconds of the video-performance: to question the polarizing nature of the war and to empathize with victims no matter what "side" they may fall on. These victims may be no different than the self, and their deaths were caused by conflict where victims are killed in an arbitrary fashion that could easily claim your own life. Embedded within the context of its production, Stiles expands

[106] Boler, "The Risks of Empathy", 267.

upon the mobilization of destruction in art as activist art that visualizes transformative processes. She argues that destruction art addresses the relationship between individuals and the contexts they navigate:

> Destruction art is about violations, those defilements continually perpetrated against the bodies and psyches of women and men. But, destruction art is not a utopic project. Rather it is a pragmatic one, enacted by artists who are profoundly sceptical but not cynical and who commingle responsiveness with reaction, and fear and loathing with great trust in the aggregate potential of art.[107]

Stiles proposes that destruction art captures the energy of destructive socio-political forces that exert themselves physically and psychologically on ordinary citizens and applies the devastating potential of these forces to the art object or performance. In this process, the energy behind these forces become visualized as the art object is obliterated and the destructive energy is redirected from the bodies of citizens to critique the structures that instigated the destructive drive. Artists, such as Kulikovska, who utilize destruction in their art practise respond to the violence embedded in the contexts they navigate and illustrate the devastation of war to make visible and reroute the energy of destructive forces.

[107] Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art", 77.

Figure 1.7 Maria Kulikovska, Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten, 2019, Video Performance, Still, full video available on artist's website, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/let-me-say-it-is-not-forgotten.

Destruction art to able carry its emotive and affective potential because it visualizes the invisible forces of destruction. The act of destruction within art responds to the power of violent destruction in society, creating a productive space for affective engagement with destruction and its wide-reaching social effects. It breaks down and swallows tensions, producing fertile debris and shattering cohesion. The act of destruction creates multiplicity, responding to the ideologies that subject bodies to destruction with the suggestion that an unstable, and fragmented reality allows space for diversity and contradiction. By harnessing the destructive power of society within the video performance, *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* transforms victims from an arbitrary mass of bodies into individuals who are all, as Judith Butler proposes, grievable.[108] Destructive power is rerouted to sever unjust alliances so that "the subject that I am is bound to

[108] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*,(New York: Verso, 2010), 38.

the subject I am not, that we each have the power to destroy and be destroyed, and that we are bound to one another in this power and precariousness" in order to forge empathy and solidarity across difference.[109] Drawing on the simultaneous mortality and violence inherent within the human condition, Butler suggests the relationship of the body to destructive capacities as a space to forge relationships recognizing that we are the same in our capability of destroying one another to the same result: death.

The body sits at the centre of *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* as the location of empathy and identification, survival and resilience, but also as the agent of destruction. The complex interplay of shooting sculptures created in her own image suggest both the blurring of divides and an act of destruction overcome. Even though replicas of her own body may have perished, her own body continues to live. Stiles argues that the body within artistic practice is a loaded site where the "ontological effects of the technology, phenomenology, and epistemology of destruction" relate to how individuals "negotiate the resulting crisis of survival".[110] Stiles positions the body as central within destruction art because it is both an agent of destruction and the most vulnerable to destruction's annihilating capacities.[111] Destruction art is a response to this human potential of becoming a snake eating its own tail, a response to the ability for the physical capabilities of the body to be both victim and perpetrator, and a means to navigate these simultaneous tendencies. Through harnessing the violent capacity of destruction and repeating, recreating it, Stiles argues that destruction art offers the possibility of healing to a society of individuals perpetually surviving.[112] Kulikovska embodies the simultaneous tendency of the

[109] Butler, *Frames of War,* 43.
[110] Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art", 75.
[111] Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art", 76.
[112] Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art", 77.

body to both kill and be killed as she stands with the sculptures she has just shot, emphasizing the constructed nature of conflict and the power to stop it. Through the various performances where she repeats the initial blows, Kulikovska visualizes the process of surviving: constantly living with destruction to heal from its devastating potential.

In this chapter I have argued that the element of survival within destruction art centred around the female body may suggest an interesting position to explore potentialities for feminism within contemporary Ukraine. By considering how women tell stories about themselves and their families, I analyze what Redi Koobak describes as "the gaps, chance encounters, and tensions that…narrate feminism differently, to bring forth new ideas about feminism in this context" by focusing on a subjective, feminist response to war and displacement.[113] Kulikovska embodies the position of both victim and perpetrator within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten*, suggesting a transference of power from her body vulnerable to violence in the form of a sculpture, to her living and active body. She illustrates the agency of the female body and suggests that in adversity one can find strength. The process of surviving is an act of rebellion in its relentless perseverance. In our conversation, Kulikovska emphasized how she came to interpret feminism by witnessing the strength of the women in her life in the face of adversity.[114] Although these women may not have identified as feminists, they challenged and demonstrated how women can adapt various subject positions out of necessity and find empowerment within this process of surviving. Kulikovska embodies this notion when she picks up the rifle suggesting the fluidity of power and the importance of this realization to considering feminism in Ukraine.

[113] Koobak, "Narrating Feminisms", 1012.
[114] Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.

The shooting of Kulikovska's sculptures composing *Army of Clones* and *Homo Bulla* by DPR militants was ideologically charged in order to construct ideal female citizens and deny those who do not conform the ability to exist within the DPR. Kulikovska described them as an execution, the symbolic killing of bodies and individuals that posed a challenge to order in the DPR, and a foreshadowing of suffering to come under their leadership.[115] By destroying her sculptures the militants symbolically established who could belong to society in the DPR by banning artists such as Kulikovska who challenged the regime.[116] *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* resists this mandate as Kulikovska refuses to conform to the position of victim and instead survives by harnessing the technology of oppression to critique. This refusal to accept the power and authority of the DPR within her video performance empowers herself as she stares at the viewer, meeting their gaze, in confrontation and challenge. She challenges them to resist the authority of militarization and instead rebel, thereby creating a situation where:

> one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remoulding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds.[117]

The processes of surviving and persevering in creative ways constitute sites of resistance that challenge forms of domination and critique binary models of understanding by dwelling in the complexities of life. Although Kulikovska chose to express her resistance through the production of artworks that respond to and incorporate destruction, as evident in our conversation, she believes that this can be achieved in the concrete ways one chooses to live their life.[118] How we

[115] Maria Kulikovska, "Autonomous Republic of Maria Kulikovska".
[116] Ilchuk, "Hearing the voice of Donbas", 256-273.
[117] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 96.
[118] Interview with Kulikovska, Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.

choose to live and respond, from the most mundane to the evident, are rebellious and political acts in themselves.

Taking advantage of the fluidity of power as a strategy of feminist resistance is evident within *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* as Kulikovska transforms from a displaced victim of annexation to an individual picking up arms in order to critique the militarist, discriminatory, and authoritarian systems that exiled her. The presence of her living body within the video performance suggests how she has harnessed the power of destruction into the power of transformation. By employing and harnessing the means of destruction within her work, *Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten* suggests that destruction and production are inextricably linked. Where something is destroyed, space can be created for new epistemologies, in this case a feminist critique, to take their place and these epistemologies incorporate the debris to refashion them in subversive and surprising permutations.

Let Me Say: It's Not Forgotten functions as a commemorative performance and response to the moment when DPR forces executed the sculptures composing *Army of Clones* and *Homo Bulla,* except in this performance Kulikovska takes the means of destruction into her own hands. The impulse to repeat the original act of execution time and time again relies on the power of destruction and violence, transforming their energy from one of complete annihilation to production. The repetitive act of destruction suggests that even by destroying the object itself, the memory and consequences of the act remain in the movement, in the gesture. The fluidity of power implied within her performance suggests a particularly contextualized feminist position that empowers women by celebrating their strength and perseverance as they navigate adversity. The video performance suggests that the process of overcoming functions as a form of resistance where the individual expresses their agency rather than victimhood. By shifting the relationships

between individuals and the contexts they navigate, the act of destruction becomes appropriated as a productive force within Kulikovska's work as it produces a space to consider and re-envision the past-present-future within the debris of destruction.

Chapter 2

Visualizing Dystopias as Testament to What Should Never Be: The Interplay of Dana Kavelina's March 8th Banners

The social, cultural, and political significance of an artwork changes when it is deliberately destroyed. The destruction of artworks, public monuments, and architecture renews attention to these objects as we grapple with the drive to preserve what remains—debris, accounts, photographs, texts—and to understand what motivated the attack.[119] The act of destruction creates new relationships between the artwork and the party who destroyed it and between the artwork and the community for whom it was valuable in the first place. These tendencies are exemplified by a story I encountered concerning a banner destroyed during a March 8th demonstration; a story that resonated with the individuals I interviewed in Ukraine.[120]

[119] For example, Boris Groys argues that the destruction of an artwork secures its place in the artistic canon because we become motivated to document the process of destruction and what remains.
Boris Groys, "Iconoclasm and the Palace of the Republic, Berlin: A conversation between Boris Groys, Nina Fischer, and Maroan el Sani", *Blind Spots,* edited by Jelle Bouwhius, Nina Fischer, Maroan el Sani, 107.

[120] The date of March 8th became recognized as International Women's Day (IWD) in 1911 under the initiative of German Social Democrat Clara Zetkin. Zetkin chose the date after learning about the general strike of women textile workers in New York City who fought for suffrage and unionization on March 8, 1908. IWD was initially formed to recognize women's rights to suffrage, safe working conditions, and rights as labourers. In 1913, The Bolshevik Party of Russia organized IWD celebrations in the hopes that it would mobilize working women—whom they believed were generally apathetic, backwards, and ignorant—to fight against the existing order. The Bolshevik Party did not intend to rally women around suffrage or women's rights, but rather sought to recruit women who attended these celebrations into their party-in fact, the Bolsheviks were against feminist movements emerging at this time. On March February 23, 1917 (March 8 of the new calendar), women amassed in large numbers in St. Petersburg, spurring the February Revolution which would gain momentum through out the year, toppling the Russian Monarchy and ushering in Bolshevik rule. Female textile workers spurred the February Revolutions with bread riots and functioned as mediators between workers and soldiers as many of them were married to soldiers; however, historians note that the crucial role of women became downplayed in Soviet history. Despite the significant attention payed to the "woman question" in Marxist theory and the implementation of legislation that granted women several rights such as equal access to education, work, and income, the Soviet regime declared "the woman question" solved and treated March 8th as a day to encourage women to participate in building the ideal communist society.
Choi Chatterjee, *Celebrating women: gender, festival culture, and Bolshevik ideology, 1910-1939,* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 10-38.

When I visited the Western Ukrainian city of L'viv during the summer of 2019, I met with local art historian Oleksandra Kushchenko who had just wrapped up her free lecture series "The Herstory of Art".[121] Kushchenko and I met at the office of the feminist organization The Feminist Workshop [феміністична майстерня] where we spoke in a quaint room with t-shirts emblazoned with slogans such as "All people are sisters" and "It is not my obligation to smile" hanging on the wall. Sitting in this space, which truly felt like a safe haven for feminist thought, debate, and query, Kushchenko began discussing her current research on women artists of the 1990s-2000s, the art scene in L'viv, and what she viewed as significant moments in contemporary art in Ukraine.[122] During our conversation, Kushchenko brought my attention to the artist Dana Kavelina and the banner she created for the March 8th demonstrations in Kyiv, 2018.[123]

The March 8th demonstrations in their current form rally around a central slogan related to contemporary women's issues that demonstrators respond to with posters, signs, and visual and material. In 2018, the unifying theme of the demonstration was "We Will No Longer Tolerate!" (Годі терпіти) and the demonstrators sought to draw attention to domestic violence by highlighting the fact that in 2017 there were more fatalities from domestic violence than fatalities in the ongoing war.[124] In collaboration with a larger group of women, Kavelina designed and painted a banner featuring a distressed naked woman in the centre of a black

[121] "The Herstory of Art" [істор(ії) мистецтва) was a free course that took place over thirteen weeks of summer 2019 in L'viv, Ukraine and was organized by The Feminist Workshop. https://genderindetail.org.ua/news/feministichna-maysternya-zapuskae-kurs-istorii-mistetstva-1341054.html
[122] Oleksandra Kushchenko, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.
[123] Oleksandra Kushchenko, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.
[124] "Акції "за права жінок" у Києві й Ужгороді були атаковані ідеологічними противниками. ВІДЕО" [Actions "for women's rights" in Kyiv and Uzhgorod were attacked by ideological opponents. Video], Novynarnia, March 8, 2018, https://novynarnia.com/2018/03/08/aktsiyi-za-prava-zhinok-u-kiyevi-y-uzhgorodi-buli-atakovani-ideologichnimi-protivnikami-video/.

background. From the margins of the banner hands holding various objects pull and prod the woman: a coat hanger, a cross, an egg, a piece of rope, and the Ukrainian trident (тризуб). These various emblems assaulting the woman represent social and political institutions that have continued to negatively impact the freedom and well-being of women in Ukrainian society. In the context of an International Women's Day march, this image explicitly illustrated what the demonstrators were arguing for and against: for a woman's right to exist free of oppression and against institutionalized forms of sexism and discrimination.

2.1 Photo by Jessica Zychowicz. March 8, 2018 Women's March Kyiv. Used with permission from the photographer.

In an interview with Oksana Briukhovetska, Kavelina discusses how the symbols on the banner represent the most pressing obstacles for women in contemporary Ukraine.[125] For example, the coat hanger pointed towards the woman's vagina refers to the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's Parliament) continually reopening the abortion debate, proposing that women should

[125] Oksana Briukhovetska and Lesia Kulchynska, eds, *Право на істину: розмови про мистецтво і фемінізм* [The Right to Truth: Conversations on Art and Feminism], (Kyiv, 2019), 36.

only terminate pregnancies for medical reasons or in the instance of rape.[126] The cross poking the woman in the head refers to the strong influence of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, especially in promoting the traditional family and corresponding gender roles.[127] The most controversial symbol, however, is the Ukrainian trident, largely considered a state emblem that has also been appropriated by far-right paramilitary organizations such as the National Militia (національні дружини). Kavelina argues that the trident was intended to suggest the prevalence of far-right violence in Ukrainian society. Indeed, it drew a violent response from this very political faction.[128]

As the demonstrators made their way through the streets displaying the torture and humiliation of their illustrated sister, they encountered fierce opposition from far-right counter protesters. The demonstrators were attacked by counter protesters who tried to rip the banner from their hands, forcing the police to intervene. The police requested that the demonstrators refrain from showing the banner for it was deemed offensive.[129] Ultimately, the banner was destroyed in the confrontation between the demonstrators, the far-right, and the police.[130] The relationship between the naked woman and the trident poking at her drew a strong response from not only the far-right but a wider audience who interpreted the imagery as criticism of the

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[126] Although Bills were proposed in both 2013 and 2017, legislation was never passed.
"Svoboda MPs Propose Legislatively Banning Abortions in Ukraine", *Interfax Ukraine-Business Express,* April 8, 2013, https://www-emis-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/php/search/doc?dcid=400772316&ebsco=1; "MP Proposes to Ban Abortions at Women's Request-Bill", *Interfax Ukraine-Business Express*, March 30, 2017, https://www-emis-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/php/search/doc?dcid=569932720&ebsco=1.

[127] Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, "The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine", *East/West Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 1, no 1 (2014): 22.

[128] The Ukrainian trident and the trident appropriated by the National Militia looking strikingly similar; however, the National Militia has exaggerated the central prong with an arrow while on the traditional trident the central prong is spear shaped. The trident on the banner includes this exaggerated feature, although at first glance it would be easy to mistake one for the other.
Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, *The Right to Truth*, 38-39.

[129] Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, *The Right to Truth*, 37-40.

[130] Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, *The Right to Truth,* 37-40; Oleksandra Kushchenko, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.

state.[131] Individuals remarked online that it is inappropriate to criticize the state during a military conflict and this controversy resulted in a lawsuit against the organizer of the march, Olena Shevchenko, for desecrating a national symbol, although charges were subsequently dropped.[132] The vehement reaction towards the banner and its ultimate destruction increased its significance for both the far-right and feminist groups alike. The far-right believed the banner exemplified their perspective that "feminism is an ideology that supports the demise of the nation".[133] Simultaneously, feminists and activists interpreted the destruction of the banner as an example of the power of images and the socio-political obstacles that must be overcome in Ukrainian society.[134]

[131] Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, *The Right to Truth*, 37-40.
[132] Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, *The Right to Truth*, 38-39.
[133] "Жінки вийшли на протест проти феміністичного шабашу" [Women protested against feminist coven], *Pravvy Sector*, March 8, 2018, https://pravyysektor.info/novyny-borotba/zhinky-vyyshly-na-protest-proty-feministychnogo-shabashu.
[134]Oleksandra Kushchenko, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine; Jessica Zychowicz, "The Politics of Empathy and Disgust in 21c. Ukraine: Rhetoric(s) of Citizenship in the March 8th Women's March in Kyiv", lecture, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, March 8, 2019.

2.2 Photo by Jessica Zychowicz, March 8, 2018 Women's March Kyiv. Photo used with permission from the photographer.

The controversy surrounding the banner engages the relationship between feminism, nationalism, and militarism in a country engaged in military conflict. The destruction of the banner raises the question: how can feminism engage in this dialogue and respond to the destructive force of far-right ideology? Kavelina would elaborate on this relationship the following year with another banner for the 2019 March 8th demonstrations similarly featuring a naked woman as the central figure. In this image, the central female figure does not show any traces of youth. This gaunt and skeletal woman lays across the centre of the banner actively birthing several infants with the faces of grown men. These men evolve into soldiers as they ascend from the bottom to the top of the picture plane and threaten the woman with a rifle, subverting the conventional mother-son relationship. The tension between the female figure and male soldiers is further exacerbated by the woman's contradictory actions as she feeds the soldiers with one hand and simultaneously points a rifle at them with the other. Her labouring body produces these figures who she both attempts to sustain and eliminate; they physically

deplete and threaten her as they evolve from children to men. The image literally reproduces the gender roles of the woman as the source of reproduction and nourishment while men take up the role of defenders; however, Kavelina critiques the sustainability of these positions through the depiction of a female body suffering at the hands of her offspring.

2.3 Dana Kavelina, 2019 Banner Created for March 8th Demonstration. Photograph available at the following link: https://hmarochos.kiev.ua/2019/03/08/zhinka-tse-lyudyna-a-ne-matka-i-vagina-yak-projshov-marsh-zhinok-u-kyyevi-foto/.

The banners function as an urgent plea to address women's issues in Ukrainian society by illustrating the effects of oppression and systemic sexism through the representation of a corpse-like female body. Rooted within a context rife with physical, ideological, and psychological conflict, in what follows my visual analysis of the two banners will be complemented by an exploration of nationalized tropes of femininity reinforced by increasing militarism in Ukrainian society. By analyzing the depictions of the naked female body in the context of a public demonstration, I argue that the two banners channel destruction through creative acts to disrupt the division of the private and the public, the visible and invisible, the picture plane and the streets. As a result, the banners illustrate a dystopia while simultaneously suggesting that an alternative reality is possible depending on how the contemporary context is navigated.

Contexts of Destruction—Contexts of Resistance

In 1987, feminist art historian Griselda Pollock presented a working definition of feminist art that incorporates a consideration of gendered power relations with a social history of art.[135] Pollock engages with the context surrounding an artwork, defining feminist art:

> according to the way [it] acts upon, makes demands of, and produces positions for its viewers. It is feminist because of the way it works as a text within a specific social space in relation to dominant codes and conventions of art and to dominant ideologies of femininity. It is feminist when it subverts the normal ways in which we view art and are usually seduced into a complicity with the meanings of the dominant and oppressive culture.[136]

Feminist art takes the contexts it is created within as its materials, content, and form, challenging the normative models of how art is produced and apprehended. For Pollock, feminist art "works" ideologies, kneading, subverting, deconstructing, and transforming the power structures inherent in them. As a result, these artworks function as history because of their desire to evoke change; they were never restricted to the picture plane and will always be in relation with the ongoing social, political, and economic context.[137] Artists and artworks are agents situated within a complex web of relations and it is up to art historians, critics, authors, and scholars to tease apart these intersections and two-way streets realizing all the while that this venture will undoubtedly be partial.

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[135] Pollock's definition of feminist art responds to tendencies in the social history of art such as T.J Clark's essay "On the Social History of Art". Clark suggests that "How, in a particular case, a content of experience becomes a form, an event becomes an image, boredom becomes its representation…the making of a work of art is one historical process among other acts, events, and structures—it is a series of actions in but also on history". Clark suggests that art works do not merely respond to the contexts they are operating within but shape these contexts as constituent parts of the social and political composition; the artwork does not operate outside of history.
T.J. Clark, "On the Social History of Art", in *Image of the People: Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 13.

[136] Griselda Pollock, "Feminism and Modernism", in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970s-85*, edited by Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, (New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 93.

[137] T.J. Clark uses the term "works" to describe how artworks engage with ideology.
Clark, "On the Social History of Art", 13.

Kavelina's banners are entrenched within a complex matrix of discourses that engage with one another to criticize the dominance of patriarchy, conservativism, and nationalism in Ukrainian society. The banners engage with the history of March 8th in Ukraine and the rise of the far-right post-Maidan by kneading the intersection of feminism, militarism, and nationalism with the female body as front and centre. Kavelina's banners offer visibility and attention to the rights of women in tumultuous times, by presenting female bodies as human, vulnerable, and capable of resistance—the ground where ideologies are fought and negotiated. Rallying against the common moniker that feminism is 'untimely' (не на часі) during periods of instability, Kavelina's banners assert that feminism is in desperate need through depicting suffering and violated female figures.[138]

Kavelina cements herself into the ongoing history of International Women's Day in Ukraine—commonly referred to as March 8th—by taking the streets of Kyiv as her exhibition space. March 8th has become a significant area of interest for tracing an active feminist movement in the region that vocalizes and visualizes issues of discrimination and women's rights; however, this has not always been the case. March 8th was designated an official holiday in 1965 during the Soviet period when its celebration took on the form of honoring the "Soviet-Superwoman", a youthful, maternal figure, promoting peace during the Cold War with her

[138] Feminists in Ukraine have rallied in opposition to the response 'untimely' (не на часі) in regards to issues of women's rights. For example, the Feminist Workshop hosted a conference in conjunction with the feminist organization FemSolution entitled 'untimely' where various speakers discussed how the war is impacting women. Olesya Khromeychuk has also noted the prevalence of this response by politicians and other segments of society. The Feminist Workshop, "Що і як сталось "(не) на часі" у Львові?" [How and what transpired during "(un)timely" in L'viv?], May 7, 2019 ,https://femwork.org/novini-fm/shho-i-yak-stalos-ne-na-chasi-u-lvovi/; Olesya Khromeychuk, "From the Maidan to the Donbas: The Limitations on Choice for Women in Ukraine", in *Gender and Choice After Socialism*, edited by Lynne Attwood, Elisabeth Schimpfössl, and Marina Yusupova, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 53.

glowing smile.[139] At this time, March 8th was celebrated akin to contemporary Mother's Day as women were greeted with poems honoring mothers as heroes and given flowers.[140] Posters and illustrations from this period often feature young women framed by lush flowers against the Soviet flag or images of children parading bouquets of flowers, stuffed animals, and boxes of chocolates to their mothers. This tradition continued long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as illustrated by annual presidential addresses such as former president Viktor Yushchenko's in 2008 where he proclaimed "on the occasion of spring, the holiday of women's beauty…my heart is filled with the most tender feelings for you".[141] Due to the predominance of essentialist celebrations of femininity on March 8th, these traditions began to come under criticism by feminist scholars and professional women who grew tired of their one-dimensional portrayal in Ukrainian society.[142]

Feminist literary scholar Solomea Pavlychko was one of the first women to criticize the celebration of March 8th in Ukraine. She argued that the traditions associated with March 8th only cemented patriarchal authority and relegated women to the role of mothers, caretakers, and wives.[143]. Her criticisms of March 8th were elaborated on by Oksana Kis', one of the first scholars to trace how Ukrainian women reframed the celebration of March 8th in their favour.[144] Kis' traces the reclamation of March 8th to the critical response of many women to the

[139] Oksana Kis', "Украдене свято: історичні трансформації смислу 8 березня" [A stolen holiday: Historic transformations in the meaning of the 8th of March], *Genderindetail.com*, March 6, 2018, https://genderindetail.org.ua/library/feministichniy-ruh/8bereznia/ukradene-svyato-istorichni-transformatsii-smislu-8-bereznya-134409.html.
[140] Kis', "A stolen holiday".
[141] Oksana Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming the Feminist Meaning of International Women's Day: A Report About Recent Feminist Activism". *Aspasia* 6, (2012): 221-222.
[142] Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming", 220-221.
[143] Solomea Pavlychko, "Feminism in Post-Communist Ukrainian Society", in *Фемінізм [Feminism],* edited by Vera Aheyeva (Kyiv: Видавництво Соломії Павличко «Основи», 2002), 70.
[144] Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming", 221-222.

Presidential Address from 2008 quoted above. Their sentiment was exacerbated by the hypocritical nature of this address as President Yushchenko was elected on the grounds of promoting greater democratic values and gender equality in Ukrainian society.[145] Women scholars, activists, and professionals penned an open letter that denounced the essentialist view demonstrated in the address associating women only with motherhood and beauty and reinforcing the need to reclaim the feminist foundations of March 8th.[146] Following this public outcry and indignation, women across Ukraine began to recraft March 8th through various creative demonstrations that drew attention to issues of discrimination, health, and power imbalances while celebrating the accomplishments of historic and contemporary Ukrainian women.[147]

Jessica Zychowicz, continuing where Kis' left off, articulates how the feminist collective *Feminist Ofenzywa* (Offensive) was central to reclaiming March 8th as a politically charged feminist occasion. She explores March 8th in Ukraine as an example of a locally situated feminist tradition that engages with the contemporary issues that Ukrainian women face daily. Her analysis:

> Offering a more globalized version of women's labour history and suffrage that predates the Bolshevik Revolution, International Women's Day provides an alternative origin story beyond the development of feminism as a specifically Soviet or Western project. The day's transatlantic beginnings provided contemporary activists in Ofenzywa with a narrative for constructing more continuous histories of local Ukrainian women's experiences beyond the conventional "transition" periodization.[148]

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[145] Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming", 220.
It is important to note that President Yushchenko's election was a result of the Orange Revolution. Viktor Yanukovych won the 2004 election, however both local and international bodies criticized the election as rigged. This led to largely civil and peaceful protests known as the Orange Revolution, resulting in a fair election with Yushchenko as successor.
[146] Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming", 221.
[147] Kis', "Ukrainian Women Reclaiming", 221-230.
[148] Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women: Feminism, Art, and Revolution in the Twenty First Century,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 190.

Zychowicz's contribution to the history of March 8th in Ukraine is significant as it draws on transnational networks of women's mobilization and suffrage in the early twentieth century to explore how Ofenzywa managed to re-establish feminism as a movement for greater human rights in the twenty first century. She argues that by making feminism public and visible in Ukrainian society, Ofenzywa managed to soften feminism's negative connotation in Ukrainian society and demonstrate that it should not be feared.[149] Ofenzywa managed to accomplish this by channeling aspects of daily life in demonstrations and art initiatives to illustrate how the tasks and identities women occupy everyday are dynamic and politically subversive sites to create meaning.[150] Elevating the significance of the everyday, initiatives such as Ofenzywa were able to extend the breadth of feminism in Ukrainian society and reinforce its applicability to issues concretely effecting women.[151]

Researchers in Ukraine have been publishing articles about the history of March 8th and chronicling the demonstrations in the public domain, continuing the tendency of illustrating feminism as accessible and applicable. These articles have been published on websites such as *genderindetail,* open access journals such as *Feminist Critique,* and discussed in Facebook groups such as *Feminism Ya* (Фемінізм Я). For example, sociologist Ganna Grytsenko has traced the March 8th demonstrations and the advent of new traditions in succinct form for a public audience.[152] In addition, Darya Popova has analyzed the changing dynamics of March 8th in Ukraine as activists argue for greater inclusivity for queer, trans, sex-workers, disabled, and

[149] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 191.
[150] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 196-197.
[151] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 196-197.
[152] Ganna Grytsenko, "Марші 8 Березня: винайдення феміністичної традиції" [The marches on the 8th of March: the invention of a feminist tradition], *Gender in Detail,* March 16, 2018, https://genderindetail.org.ua/library/ukraina/marshi-8-bereznya-vinaydennya-feministichnoi-traditsii-134428.html.

HIV positive voices.[153] These articles come together to create a vibrant and engaged discourse on the significance of March 8th and the history of feminism in Ukraine, a history of resistance of which Kavelina's banners have undoubtedly become a part.

Although activists and artists have transformed March 8th into a prominent platform for feminists to engage with the Ukrainian public, when Kavelina's 2018 banner was destroyed by counter protesters, it became evidence of a much more troubling trend in Ukrainian society: the proliferation of far-right ideology and representation. The far-right in Ukraine—also referred to as radical nationalists or ultra nationalists—are generally defined by two primary tendencies: xenophobia and the willingness to engage in political violence.[154] These groups promote, justify, and employ violence against those who they deem to be political opponents such as members of ethnic or religious groups, the LGBTQIA+ community, leftist activists, and feminists.[155] The far-right has received increased attention in academia following the involvement of primarily two major organizations in the Revolution of Dignity, especially as the protests grew increasingly violent—The All Ukrainian Union Freedom "Svoboda" and Pravyy Sector (Right Sector), the latter emerging as a group during the protests[156] Far-right groups such as Pravyy Sector were

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[153] Daria Popova, "Жіночий чи феміністичний? Що трапилося з маршем до 8 Березня" [Women's or feminist: What happened at the march for the 8th of March], *Feminist Critique: The Eastern European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies* 2 (2019): 85-88.

[154] Vyacheslav Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others: The behaviour and role of radical nationalists in the Ukrainian political crisis of 2013- early 2014", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48, no. 2-3 (2015): 269.

[155] Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 259.

[156] The "Svoboda" Party is the descendant of the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). As the SNPU transformed into the Svoboda Party (2004) it began to distance itself from more radical contingents of its ideology such as relinquishing the use of the Wolfsangel—a recognized neo-Nazi symbol—and disbanding paramilitary groups. Despite these efforts, activists and members of unofficial youth groups involved with the Svoboda Party continued to engage in homophobic attacks and attacks against leftist activists in the years before the Revolution of Dignity. Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 260.
Pravvy Sektor emerged from the fringe paramilitary group "Tryzub"—full name "Stepan Bandera All-Ukrainian Organization "Tryzub"—that functioned "de facto, it was more a Scouts organization on the basis of nationalist ideology than a political movement"(founded in 1993). Pravyy Sector was organized over the course of the Revolution of Dignity from individuals involved in "Tryzub" and others who held a similar ideology.
Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 261-262.

responsible for mobilizing violence against the regime and making the Maidan alienating for leftist and feminist activists.[157] For example, during the Revolution of Dignity members of Pravvy Sector forcibly removed posters held by members of Feminist Ofenzywa on November 24, 2013 and attacked and pepper sprayed participants in a women's rights rally on November 28, 2013.[158] The far-right have also gained the attention of media and scholars following their organization of "volunteer" battalions at the outbreak of war in Ukraine's eastern regions, the most notorious being the Azov Battalion.[159] Through the political turbulence of 2013-2014 that has continued with the ongoing war, the far-right have found avenues where their skills and ideologies could become integrated with more mainstream sentiments of government distrust and the dynamics of war.

The far-right's ultra-nationalist ideology and militarist tactics have been fuelled by the geopolitical conflicts occurring in contemporary Ukraine and the climate of polarizing "us vs.

Groups such as Pravyy Sektor promote themselves as a national liberation movement founded by their interpretation of Ukrainian nationalism. This form of nationalism is grounded in a militarist ideology of sacrifice and armed resistance inspired by World War II partisan armies such as OUN (The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) whose dominant faction was led by Stephan Bandera, and UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) whose history is a continual historic minefield. Debates continue in Ukraine and the diaspora today about how to remember the history of these groups— who were formed to fight the Nazi and Soviet occupation of Ukraine during WWII and afterwards—and the degree of their involvement in war crimes and atrocities.
Pravvy Sector, "Хто ми" [Who are we], accessed February 15, 2020, https://pravyysektor.info/hto-my.
Anton Shekhovstov and Andreas Umland, "The Maidan and Beyond: Ukraine's Radical Right", *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 58-59.

[157] William Jay Risch, "What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us About the Maidan", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, 1 (2015): 138; Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 263.

[158] Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 263.

[159] The Azov Battalion was an informal paramilitary until, sometimes referred to as a volunteer battalion, that formed in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine's Donbas region following the Revolution of Dignity and the Ukrainian military's lack of initial organization and competency. It is one of roughly three dozen of such units. The Azov Battalion was the most notorious of these paramilitary units because of their neo-Nazi and fascist political views.
Andreas Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Maydan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the "Azov" Battalion in 2014", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 1 (2019): 106-107.

them" rhetoric discussed in the previous chapter.[160] Political scientist and historian Andreas Umland has analyzed the rise of the far-right in Ukraine within politics, volunteer battalions, and activism as "[they] would not have occurred without the increasingly destructive Russian interference in Ukrainian internal affairs throughout 2014. The rising social demand for militant patriotism provided previously marginal far-right activists with new political space".[161] Umland's analysis suggests that the tensions and threat posed by the annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbas have increased militarist and nationalist sentiment within Ukrainian society, thereby the far-right found grounds such as the military, veterans, and youth groups where their ideologies could resonate. The demarcation of an enemy of the people and the nation, have given the far right someone to fight against, but also motive to fight against anyone they fear may destabilize the nation internally.

Discussing the far-right in Ukraine is a discursive minefield as it is important not to over-exaggerate the role of the far-right in the Revolution of Dignity and in their immediate response to the annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbas, while also not ignoring their continued threat to leftist activists.[162] The far-right received its most successful electoral result through the "Svoboda" party in 2012, before the Euromaidan. Historian Vyacheslav Likhachev suggests that "Svoboda's" success had less due to do with its ideology than its position as a viable opposition to Yanukovych's increasingly corrupt, repressive, and authoritarian regime favoring Russian interests instead of Ukrainian ones.[163] In the elections following the Revolution of Dignity, far-right parties performed poorly and received miniscule, if no representation in parliament, mainly

[160]Darya Malyutina, "The Impact of the Armed Conflict in the East of Ukraine on Relations Among Scholars of Ukraine Across Europe", *TOPOS: Journal For Philosophy and Cultural Studies* 2, (2018): 104.
[161] Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism", 108.
[162] Several scholars who have been careful not to over emphasize the role of the far right include Likhachev, Risch, and Shekhostvstov.
[163] Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 261.

due to the extreme, violent, and erratic behavior of many of these groups following the Revolution of Dignity.[164] In the May 25, 2014 elections, the far-right received less that 10 percent of the overall vote, and in the October 26, 2014 elections, received even poorer results.[165] Simultaneously, Amnesty International and the Atlantic Council have reported that despite poor electoral results, the far-right continue to present a threat to Ukrainian society because police and government officials have historically failed to respond to their hate-fuelled activities.[166]

Despite the dismissal of the far-right as a major threat to Ukrainian politics, feminist and LGBTQIA+ activists are frequently verbally and even physically attacked during demonstrations, as exemplified by the destruction of Kavelina's banner.[167] In the interviews I conducted while in Ukraine, artists and activists frequently recalled their interactions with the far-right and conservatism. For example, Maria Kulikovska described the virulent response to the first Kyiv Pride Parade in 2015 and the precautions participants had to take in subsequent years to avoid being attacked or stalked by counter protesters.[168] In addition, Marta Bonyk—working

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[164] Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others", 269. See Likhachev, "The "Right Sector" and others" for a list of these incidences.

[165] Risch, "What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us", 142-143.

[166] Josh Cohen, "Ukraine's Got a Real Problem With Far-Right Violence (And No, RT Didn't Write This Headline), The Atlantic Council, June 20, 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-s-got-a-real-problem-with-far-right-violence-and-no-rt-didn-t-write-this-headline/; "Ukraine: human rights under pressure, their advocates under attack", Amnesty International Public Statement, February 8, 2019, AI Index: EUR 50/9827/2019, Amnesty International Public Statement, "Ukraine: human rights under pressure, their advocates under attack", February 8, 2019. AI Index: EUR 50/9827/2019.

[167] Shekhovstov and Umland, "The Maidan and Beyond"; Risch, "What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us", 137-44.

[168] Kulikovska elaborated how in 2015 a policeman was killed while protecting the participants in the parade by a far-right protester. She continued to describe the Pride Parade in 2018 that took place in the city centre of Kyiv as the participants were corralled by metal fences where far-right counter protesters angrily threw rocks, shouted, and intimidated the participants. After the parade, participants were escorted by police to the Metro station where they had to wait for a separate train car to pick them up and take them to the end of the track where only then they could disperse. They were asked to change their clothes and were advised not to wear or carry anything that may identify them with the parade. Kulikovska concluded describing the 2018 Pride Parade by reflecting on being made to feel as if they had been the ones committing a crime because they were forced to conceal their identities and function under threat of being seen.
Maria Kulikovska, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.

with the grassroots organization The Feminist Workshop in L'viv, Ukraine—described how difficult it has been to promote certain exhibitions and events. For example, she told me how The Feminist Workshop organized an exhibit for March 8th in 2018 at their office in central L'viv, but that organizers and attendees were attacked by individuals from the far-right.[169] Bonyk emphasized that the organization is constantly weighing the danger of organizing events under the terms "feminist", "queer", or "LGBTQIA+" for fear of similar attacks.[170] She situated this reception to feminist initiatives by painting a picture of L'viv as a conservative city where the traditional family structure composed of the male breadwinner and female stay-at-home wife is upheld as an ideal and reinforced by the strong influence of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches.[171] Scholars Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk have reiterated the sentiment expressed by Kulikovska and Bonyk, citing several anti-gender movements that gained momentum in the 2010s and positioned what were considered "Western" ideals such as gender equality against traditional family structures.[172]

In contrast to Kulikovska's experiences in 2018, Jessica Zychowicz has described the 2019 Kyiv Pride March as well attended, more organized, and safer. There was still a very strong police presence around the route of the march, but police had detained several individuals associated with extremist groups ahead of the official march. The day saw less violent confrontations between participants in the march and far-right provocateurs. For the first time, veterans, government employees with the Ministry of Health, and military servicemen joined the march-making a statement that more spaces are attempting to welcome LGBTQIA+ individuals in Ukraine.
Jessica Zychowicz, "What About the Drone? Ukraine Hosts Most Successful LGBTQ Event in the Nation's History, but Not Without New Challenges", *Forum for Ukrainian Studies,* August 13, 2019, https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2019/08/13/what-about-the-drone-ukraine-hosts-most-successful-LGBTQIA+q-event-in-the-nations-history-but-not-without-new-challenges/.

[169] Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.

[170] Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.
During the march, the far-right counter protesters also threw paint on demonstrators.
"Наслідки 8 березня: що відбувається після"[The consequences of March 8th: what happens afterwards], *Genderindetail.com,* March 17, 2018, https://genderindetail.org.ua/news/naslidki-8-bereznya-scho-vidbuvaetsya-pislya-134429.html.

[171] Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.

[172] Hankivsky and Skoryk, "The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements Against Gender Equality in Ukraine", 22-30.

Bonyk illustrated this social phenomenon with the example of festivals promoting "traditional family values" (фестиваль за традиційні сімейні цінності). In previous years, attendees at these festivals in L'viv would advertise banners reading "Family Above All" and "Gender Kills".[173] These "Family Festivals" are organized by the group "United for the Family" (всі разом—за сім'ю) and combine Christian values with nationalist sentiment in parades, workshops, and concerts in cities across Ukraine.[174] Taking place in June, the festivals are organized by Christian religious institutions in collaboration with the city, activists, and receptive businesses. Together they unite under the goal of "creating a social tradition of strong and happy families. Our mission—to build a country where the family and family values are key priorities of the social tradition and state politics".[175] From the organization's website, the festivals appear to be all ages events that draw large crowds. For example, in 2017, the organization claimed that 30,000 people attended their festival in Kyiv.[176] Although the website does not contain any explicitly anti-gender rhetoric, the festivals do strongly promote a family unit composed of a mother, father, and child, as evident by the banners carried through the parade. In addition, some of the festivals are overtly pro-life; for example, the 2017 march in Ivano-Frankivsk rallied around the slogan "March for Life and Family Values" (Марш за життя та сімейні цінності) and images of unborn fetuses were printed on large banners.[177] These festivals largely contrast

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[173] Marta Bonyk, interviewed by Kalyna Somchynsky, September 1, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.
The concept of gender is widely misunderstood in Ukrainian society partly because it does not have a direct translation into the Ukrainian language and was only introduced into the vernacular in 1995. The term is often conflated with only women's issues and viewed as a foreign concept. I assume that the banners reading "Gender Kills!" refers to the pro-life position of these Family Festivals and their campaigns against abortion, possibly viewed by these groups as an intrusion on their traditional values.
Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova, "Gender Mainstreaming in post-Soviet Ukraine: Application and Applicability", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 26, 3 (2010): 317-319.
[174] "Всі разом—за сім'ю!" [United for the family!], *vsirazom.ua*, accessed February 6, 2020, https://vsirazom.ua/family2017ua.
[175] "United for the family!".
[176] "United for the family!".
[177] "United for the family!".

the feminist initiatives promoted by organizations such as The Feminist Workshop as they seek to cement the status quo by tying it to the overall stability of the country and makeup of the nation.

Feminism and women's rights are frequently considered by official bodies to be low priorities in Ukrainian society, overshadowed by militarism and nationalism in response to the ongoing war in the Donbas and annexation of Crimea. As discussed above, this context has been described by the moniker 'untimely' (не на часі)—a common response to calls by feminist activists to address issues of women's rights, violence against women, and the large numbers of female internally displaced persons in Ukraine.[178] These issues of gender discrimination fall subordinate to overcoming economic instability and building and defending the nation. The tendency to dismiss issues of gender in light of issues of national stability were exemplified during the Revolution of Dignity and recalled by feminist blogger and head of the Facebook Group Feminist UA Maria Dmytrieva. Dmytrieva noted that her attempts to bring attention to feminism and women's discrimination were received with hostility because some participants in the protests argued that "we have many external enemies, and criticizing one's own only benefits the enemies'".[179] This sentiment was exacerbated following the outbreak of war in the Donbas region, and feminists have repeatedly drawn attention to the link between war, gender discrimination, and violence against women. For example, the theme "не на часі" was the rallying cry for the 2015 March 8th demonstrations and was also the focus for a series of panel discussions and exhibitions organized by The Feminist Workshop and FemSolution, in which

[178] Khromeychuk, "From the Maidan to the Donbas", 53-55.
[179] Khromeychuk, "From the Maidan to the Donbas", 53.

Kavelina took part.[180] In post-Soviet Ukraine, it has been difficult overall to establish a strong women's movement, but it has been further discouraged as human rights abuses, political violence, and electoral reform have been deemed "more important, more pressing issues".[181] The banners Kavelina created for the March 8th demonstrations in both 2018 and 2019 are situated in and react with vitriol to this environment of sweeping women's rights issues under the rug, suggesting that addressing issues of gender discrimination and rights are timely, if not incredibly urgent.

The Visible and the Invisible Naked Female Body

On March 8, 2018, several people stand in front of the Kyiv City Administration Building (Київська Міська Державна Адміністрація) holding the large cloth banner painted by Dana Kavelina. Standing vertically as tall as the demonstrators who grasp its edges and as wide as several of their bodies, the banner demands the attention of those gathered along the street. On the matte black background, the body of a naked woman, as large, if not larger than the demonstrators, has been painted with gestural brushstrokes in bright pink tones. Her body is not grounded on the background—lacking any indication of a horizon or depth—but rather appears to defy the pull of gravity and floats across the black abyss as if she is unable to control its movements. The combination of the flat background, the powerless position of the woman's

[180] Grytsenko, "The Marches on the 8th of March: the invention of a feminist tradition; "Що і як сталось "(не) на часі" у Львові?" [How and what transpired during "(un)timely" in L'viv?], *femwork.org,* May 7, 2019, https://femwork.org/novini-fm/shho-i-yak-stalos-ne-na-chasi-u-lvovi/.

[181] Olga Onuch and Tamara Martsenyuk, "Mother and Daughters of the Maidan: Gender, repertoires of violence and the division of labour in Ukrainian protests", *Social, Health and Communication Studies Journal: Contemporary Ukraine: A case of Euromaidan* 1 (2014): 111.

body, and the contrast between the black background and the woman's pink flesh allow her body to transcend the picture plane and enter the space of the street.

Defying the confines of the picture plane, the woman attempts to run away, but is attacked by a series of disembodied arms. The arms grasp several items used to assault her body: where a rope wraps around her torso and the trident prods her thigh, her pink flesh has been accented with purples, indicating inflamed and bruised skin. Desperately searching for relief, the woman extends her hand and directs her gaze towards the right corner of the picture plane where a flesh coloured hand appears to be reaching into the image to free the woman of any further suffering. Unfortunately, the woman is not rescued from the oppressive reality depicted in the confines of the picture place during the demonstration and instead becomes further subject to the violence of nationalism. The symbolic violence of nationalism—depicted by the trident in the image—was actualized in the street as her body was physically destroyed by the far-right.

The 2018 banner described above both predates and contextualizes the banner created for the March 8th demonstrations the following year. The 2019 banner continues the narrative proposed on its predecessor but places destruction and censorship front and centre in the depiction of the female body. The body has undergone a transformation from a robust and youthful, yet battered body (2018) to a gaunt, deprived, and depleted female body (2019). The woman lays across the foreground of the black banner with bald head arched backwards and empty black eyes pointed up towards an undiscernible ether as she experiences the pains of labour and continually births several infant-soldiers. These adult infants metamorphize into grown soldiers, as soon as they enter the world—one even points a rifle towards the woman's open vagina. In contrast to the aching red tones depicting her body, these babies have been painted in a ghostly grey. The woman's monstrous body is composed of four arms, indicating the

over-exertion of her body to fulfill multiple tasks simultaneously. Extending from her throbbing and inflamed body, two arms hold a pot of borscht and a spoon, feeding and nurturing the open mouths of her parasitic offspring. The obligation to continually birth, nurture, and mother become too much for this figure who is dying to accomplish these tasks. With her two remaining hands, she points a rifle towards her newborn children while picking up one of these infants-turned-soldiers with the other.

In the space between her spread knees, these men have grown into fully featured men, evolving into soldiers as they ascend along the right edge of the picture plane. Above her agonized face, the soldiers have been depicted in sequence with the first extending his arm towards the woman's face. With one face overlapping the next, they suggest a lineage of men to come. The woman has only birthed male infants, gendering the image in terms of the roles men and women occupy within this dystopia: women feed and reproduce, while men defend.

Or do they?

Kavelina's 2019 banner challenges this assumption by painting the soldiers aiming at the vagina of the woman who birthed them with their rifles. They are no longer defending the national mother embodied by the woman on the image but threatening her with sexual violence and defilement. Birthing these soldiers, the woman becomes subordinate and disposable to the nation as the soldiers reinforce their position as patriarchal authorities. Recognizing her position of oppression, she attempts infanticide as she points her own rifle towards these adult infants continuing to crawl out of her vagina.

The content of the 2019 banner engages with the ideologies of feminism, nationalism, and militarism through the depiction of the female body in relation to tropes of femininity and

motherhood prevalent in Ukrainian culture and reinforced by the instability caused by war. The intersection of feminism, nationalism, and militarism has become a prominent question for scholars studying Ukraine post-independence, during the Revolution of Dignity, and in its current situation at war. The question is: to what extent feminism can reconcile with nationalism and militarism in the context of Ukraine or whether women's and LGBTQIA+ rights will always fall subordinate to their totalizing ideologies? Although positioned as a binary structure of the compatibility/incompatibility for nationalism, militarism, and feminism to coexist, scholars fall within a spectrum of perspectives.[182] Kavelina positions herself within this debate by proposing a female body at the mercy of performing the role of mother and provider under a patriarchal system, as indicated by feeding an army of male soldiers, and at the same time functioning as a living corpse while occupying these subject positions.

The image of a barely living, monstrous, female body, in labour birthing a generation of soldiers, subverts the stereotype of the mother of the nation prevalent in societies grappling with nation building and independence. As indicated earlier by the Soviet celebrations of March 8th and the scale of contemporary "Family Festivals", the image of the ideal mother as graceful and

[182] For the various positions in this debate see the following sources: Solomea Pavlychko, *Феменізм* [Feminism], edited by Vera Aheyeva, (Kyiv: Publishing House in the Name of Solomea Pavlychko «Osnovy», 2002); Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Feminist (De)Constructions of Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space", in *Mapping Difference: The Many Faces of Women in Contemporary Ukraine,* edited by Marian J. Rubchak, 173-192. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "(Anti)National Feminisms, Post-Soviet Gender Studies: Women's Voices of Transition and Nation-Building in Ukraine", *Österreichishe Osthefte* 43 (2001): 503-523; Oksana Kis', "(Re)Constructing Ukrainian Women's History: Actors, Authors, and Narratives", in *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine*, edited by Olena Hankivsky and Anastasiya Salnykova, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2012); Sarah D. Philips, "The Women's Squad in Ukraine's protests: Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism on the Maidan", *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society* 41, No. 3 (2014): 414-426; Tamara Martsenyuk and Ganna Grytsenko, "Women and Military in Ukraine: Voices of the Invisible Battalion", *UA: Ukraine Analytica: Special Issue Gender in Power* 1, 7 (2017): 29-37; Olha Plakhotnik and Maria Mayerchuk, "Між колоніальністю і націоналізмом: генеалогії феміністичного активізму в Україні" [Between colonialism and nationalism: a genealogy of feminist activism in Ukraine]. *Gender in Detail.* July 18, 2019. https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/gender-after-euromaidan/mizh-kolonialnistyu-i-natsionalizmom-genealogii-feministichnogo-aktivizmu-v-ukraini-1341124.html?fbclid=IwAR2I7G1VJONfh7ZCBBlQUjQiDhcr3Ad5wg62LwciWzckAykVUuuUgkAlVy4.

ceaselessly nurturing has pervaded across Ukrainian society, akin to its depiction in many contexts globally. This stereotype has been further reinforced by the nationalist mythology of the *Berehynia.* Solomea Pavlychko describes the *Berehynia* as "The Hearth-Mother…a Ukrainian pagan goddess or stalwart peasant. She is the perfect Ukrainian woman, the spirit of the Ukrainian home, the ideal mother, who played an important role in national history, the preserver of language, and national identity".[183] Through this frame, the quintessential role of women in post-Soviet Ukraine was limited to preserving and promoting Ukrainian culture through birthing and raising a new generation of Ukrainians. Women were perceived as biological and cultural tools to foster national growth. Kavelina's banner draws on the figure of the nurturing, pregnant mother—the *berehynia*—except this woman's body illustrates the destructive potential of embodying this stereotype.

The trope of the beautiful Ukrainian mother has regained significance in Ukrainian society with the rise of increasing nationalist sentiment as a response to the ongoing conflict. During the Revolution and Dignity and the conflict that followed, sociologists Tamara Martsenyuk and Olga Onuch noted that women once again became associated with reproduction and men with protection.[184] These gendered tropes are evident in several murals that emerged on the streets of Kyiv following the Euromaidan, reinforcing the roles of men and women in the post-revolutionary society. For example, a multi-story mural overlooking *Andriyivskyy Uzviz* (Андріївський узвіз) in Kyiv features a young woman with a wreath of flowers around her head and wearing an embroidered blouse overlooking Kyiv's historic centre.[185] The buildings appear

[183] Pavlychko, "Feminism in Post-Communist Ukrainian Society", 74.
[184] Onuch and Martsenyuk, "Mothers and Daughters of the Maidan", 112.
[185] The wreath of flowers and the embroidered blouse have become emblems of a Ukrainian nationalized femininity derived from Ukrainian folk culture.

to be emerging from the heads of two men, suggesting that the foundations of the city have emerged from the minds of men. One of the woman's arms reaches around the city, seemingly protecting it, while in the other a young boy sits perched in her hand. The mural depicts a contemporary reincarnation of the *berehynia* promoting and protecting Ukrainian culture while also inspiring a new generation of men who will continue to build the city, and by extension the nation.

2.4 Kalyna Somchynsky, Mural on Andriyivskyy Descent, Kyiv. August 2019. Kyiv, Ukraine.

The masculine trope of the male protector can be seen in other murals located near the centre of Kyiv also painted following the Revolution of Dignity. These murals frequently play with historic examples of Ukrainian masculinity such as the *cossacks* (козаки)—a frontier group of individuals fleeing Polish and Russian occupation in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries who briefly established an independent polity on the territory of contemporary Ukraine known as the Cossack Hetmanate.[186] The Cossack Hetmanate is frequently cited as a historic example of Ukrainian independence and has become a significant era in Ukrainian national history.[187] In one mural, a Ukrainian Cossack wearing an embroidered blouse and *sharavary* (шаравари)—loose pants of Persian origin—with the head of an eagle stands atop a topographically rendered disk floating in the atmosphere. A dragon with two hands instead of a head and tail attempts to grab this disk-shaped piece of land, but the Cossack slices its body in half. The imagery references St. George slaying the dragon, suggesting that the dragon is Russia, and by extension the devil, trying to take land away from the Ukrainian nation. This combination of loaded imagery promotes an interpretation of Ukrainian nationalism as part of a historical lineage led by masculine warriors and Christianized, thereby militarizing the contemporary nation even further.

[186] Serhy Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25-32.
[187] Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*, 25-32.

2.5 Kalyna Somchynsky, Mural of Kozak as St. George, Kyiv. August 2019. Kyiv, Ukraine.

The representation of the female body in the 2019 banner incorporates militarism into the interplay of nationalism and feminism not only through the depiction of the male infants as soldier, but by depicting an armed woman. The monstrous woman armed with a rifle complicates both the woman's vulnerability and her relationship to the soldiers. It is common in times of conflict for the Ukrainian national mother to be depicted armed in some capacity. In this way,

she not only metaphorically protects the national culture, but physically does so as well.[188] This is most prominently evident in the Statue of the Motherland overlooking the Dnipro river in Kyiv. This monolithic statue was erected following World War II during the Soviet period and stands with a sword and armour protecting the city. In addition to gendering the nation as female, the statue eternally militarizes the nation. By depicting the woman in the banner with the rifle, Kavelina emphasizes how women have begun occupying these male subject positions as the nation is viewed under threat; however, this relationship is subverted in the image. As the soldiers point their rifle towards her body and she towards theirs, an antagonistic relationship is formed. The soldiers are no longer protecting her body and she no longer feels the need to protect theirs.

[188] This is a major point of contention within feminist discourse in Ukraine as scholars such as Mayerchuk and Plakhotnik have argued that by militarizing women, we only strengthen masculine subject positions. Therefore, women can only be empowered by occupying these positions.
Plakhotnik and Mayerchuk, "Між колоніальністю і націоналізмом: генеалогії феміністичного активізму в Україні" [Between colonialism and nationalism: a genealogy of feminist activism in Ukraine].

2.6 Kalyna Somchynsky, Statue of the Motherland, Kyiv. August 2019. Kyiv, Ukraine.

Kavelina's banners interact with the mythologized and nationalized tropes of femininity and masculinity by depicting them in a nightmarish scene of violence. Pushing these tropes to their limits, Kavelina's 2019 banner unmasks the dark realities occurring in contemporary Ukrainian society by channelling historic instances of female humiliation in public. The force of patriarchal authority in the form of rape and forced prostitution especially during periods of war is emphasized by the woman's bald head. In her exploration of visual traces of trauma, Kristine Stiles argues that the ways bodies are marked through coercive social processes function as

manifestations of power and authority over female bodies. She uses the shaved head as an example of this relationship by drawing on examples from the Bible and how the French shaved the heads of women accused of sleeping with German soldiers during World War II to name a few.[189] Within this analysis, she posits that:

> the visual discourse of the phallocratic order may be seen in the shaved female head, the site where the rule by the phallus joins power and sexuality…shaved heads signify humiliation, a visual manifestation of a supralineal condition of domination and power that joins war and violence to the abuses of rule by the phallus.[190]

The female body with a shaved head, exhibited in public, is a visual reminder of a patriarchal system where women are not only subordinate, but their bodies controlled by men. Shaving a woman's head is less about her actions, often a sexual treason in Stile's examples, than the fact that her actions compromised the phallocratic order represented by the state, military, community, nation or religion and she must be punished in excess of the humiliation she caused. The bald figure in Kavelina's banner thus becomes an example of the reigning authority of the nation physically and psychologically abusing her; a visual testament to the power of the nation over all citizens.

Stiles's exploration of shaved heads in contexts of war links the authority over the female body, as represented by shaving a female traitor's head, with the control of her sexuality and sexual agency.[191] She links the trauma of humiliation brought on by the shaved head with the trauma of sexual abuse and rape during war, both examples of physical domination over the female body.[192] This relationship between the shaved head and sexual abuse brings issues of

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[189] Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma", in *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3-5.
[190] Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies", 4.
[191] Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies", 3.
[192] Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies", 4.

sexual abuse and rape in the occupied territories of Ukraine to the forefront of the image. In Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, sexual violence, gender-based crimes, rape, ill treatment and torture as well as increased domestic violence and human trafficking to armed groups has been documented from combatants on either side of the conflict.[193] Although consensus has been reached that these crimes are taking place, it is difficult to know the breadth of the problem because of under-reporting of these crimes due to a lack of justice, trauma, and social humiliation.[194] For example, one lieutenant in the Ukrainian army filed a sexual harassment complaint against a colonel, her complaint was initially rejected by prosecutors, and she faced abuse online and in person after details of her case were published in the media.[195] When I was in Ukraine, some activists mentioned that women were starting to report rapes committed by Ukrainian combatants to NGOs, opening a dialogue about increasing violence against women during times of war. Kavelina's banner brings the discussion of sexual violence against women to the streets, advocating for increasing transparency and justice for victims.

Kavelina's decision to address women's oppression in Ukrainian society with the depiction of unidealized naked, female figures was a provocative gesture given the historically negative reception towards these critical representations. In contemporary Ukrainian art, feminist artists have continually struggled with censorship and destruction when depicting the naked female body.[196] This tendency was exemplified in the previous chapter through the study of nude

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[193] Ioannis P. Tzivaras, "Sexual Violence in War-Torn Ukraine: A Challenge for International Criminal Justice", in *The Use of Force Against Ukraine and International Law: Jus Ad Bellum, Jus in Bello, Jus Post Bellum*, edited by Sergey Sayapin and Evhen Tsymbulenko, (The Hague: T.M.C Asser Press, 2018), 411-413.
[194] Tzivaras, "Sexual Violence in War-Torn Ukraine", 415; Iuliia Mendel, "'A Good Career If I Satisfied Him.' Ukraine Fights Sexual Abuse, and a War", *The New York Times,* May 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/19/world/europe/ukraine-sex-abuse-miitary-war.html.
[195] Mendel, "'A Good Career If I Satisfied Him'".
[196] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 279.

sculptures of artist Maria Kulikovska's body shot by DPR militants. Kulikovska extensively explores the representation of the female body in her work and has faced criticism for her series *Army of Clones* (2010-2014) when they were exhibited in the public park of Dovzhenko film studio and the feminist open platform *Flowers of Democracy* (2015).[197] She was even the target of a manhunt by far-right nationalists when *Flowers of Democracy* was enacted in eastern Ukraine near the occupied territories.[198] Artworks such as Kavelina's banner and Kulikovska's sculptures provoke audiences because they represent the female body outside the control of patriarchal authorities such as the male gaze, the state, or the church, and challenge or critique representations of the female body in mainstream society.[199] Artist Valentyna Petrova and artist/curator Oksana Briukhovetska have elaborated on this tendency. Petrova frequently incorporates her body into performance-based works and argues that the naked female body is constantly subject to policing that regulates where nudity is acceptable. The naked female body is allowed to be visible in contexts where it is sexualized and objectified; however, if it defies

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[197] Kulikovska explained many individuals remarked that the sculptures composing *Army of Clones* were embarrassing for Kulikovska, male members of the public often groped the sculptures and made sexist jokes and comments, while other individuals proclaimed that they were offensive and should be destroyed.
Maria Kulikovska, "Autonomous Republic of Maria Kulikovska", *mariakulikovska.net*, https://www.mariakulikovska.net/en/autonomous-republic-maria-kulikovska.
The open platform *Flowers of Democracy* was composed of Kulikovska making several casts of her vagina and hanging them in strategic places across Ukrainian cities while her face was masked by a t-shirt printed with these casts. Kulikovska notes that individuals often remarked that this action was inappropriate and perverted.
Juliet Jacques, interview with Jessica Zychowicz and Maria Kulikovska, "Reimagining Utopias: Art and Politics in 21st Century Ukraine", for *SUITE 212,* Izolyatsia Cultural Platform, Kyiv, 2019, https://soundcloud.com/suite-212/reimagining-utopias-art-and-politics-in-21st-century-ukraine.

[198] Jacques, "Reimagining Utopias".

[199] I use the term 'male gaze' as articulated by Laura Mulvey: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly." The 'male gaze' is the product of a structured encounter between the subject who becomes object through being looked at—typically with desire—and the spectator who does the looking. The spectator holds the power in this relationship as the subject is composed within a work of art, or in the case of Mulvey in film, to bring pleasure, gratification, and confirmation to the spectator.
Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Visual and Other Pleasures. Language, Discourse, Society,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 19.

these functions, the individual is shamed or subject to violence.[200] Briukhovetska elaborates that in Ukraine, genitalia is considered private and shameful; representing the vagina is only acceptable within prostitution and pornography where it becomes property.[201] Petrova's and Briukhovetska's recollections highlight how representing the naked female body outside the longstanding tradition of the female nude as either or both idealized and objectified is a transgressive gesture frequently received with hostility.

Kavelina's banners point an accusatory finger at patriarchal structures of authority by defying what have been codified as acceptable female nudes. This gesture of accusation most likely instigated the destructive reception of the 2018 banner because it implicated the church, and more importantly, the state in the active oppression of female citizens. The 2019 banner took this one step further by depicting the female body after it endured the mutually repressive forces of nationalism and militarism over the duration of the year; ideologies that gained momentum as the war continued. These banners contribute to the discourse surrounding feminism, nationalism, and militarism in Ukraine, suggesting that nationalism and militarism will only take advantage of women's bodies and will always be rooted in systems of domination and hierarchy. Engaging with these ideologies, the banner "may have ideology…as its material, but it *works* that material; it gives it a new form and at certain moments that new form is in itself a subversion of ideology".[202] Kavelina plays with these ideologies and addresses them, but as she translates this debate into pictorial form, the relationships become further complicated. Nationalism and

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[200] Oksana Briukhovetska, "Жінка та її тіло [The Woman and Her Body], *Political Critique* (December 15, 2015): 3. https://politkrytyka.org/2015/12/15/zhinka-ta-yiyi-tilo/.

[201] Oksana Briukhovetska, "Образ жертви і емансипація. Нарис про українську арт-сцену і фемінізм: Український фемінізм мінус Фемен" [A Portrait of Sacrifice and Emancipation. An Overview of the Ukrainian Art Scene and Feminism: Ukrainian Feminism Minus Femen], *Prostory,* (September 3, 2017). https://prostory.net.ua/ua/krytyka/139-obraz-zhertvy-i-emansypatsiia-narys-pro-ukrainsku-art-stsenu-i-feminizm.

[202] Clark, "On the Social History of Art", 13.

militarism appear as self-destructive and unsustainable ideologies if they do not guarantee the well being, nor protect, all citizens. The female body is no longer merely naked, violated, and oppressed, but has become depleted, starved, hanging onto life as it is transformed into the abject.[203]

Destruction=Production: Navigating Dystopia

The two female figures at the centre of Kavelina's banners were physically exhibited by the demonstrators where they continued to encounter other bodies on the street. Positioned amongst the bodies holding the banners, the bodies of the naked women appear almost life-sized and the bodies of the demonstrators become implicated within the scene unfolding on the banners. In the 2018 banner, the various hands within the image have been painted in unnatural flesh tones: reds and blues, except for the hand that may be offering assistance from the right edge of the picture plane. The hands of the demonstrators extend into the banner as allies to the flesh coloured hand at the top right of the frame, all working to pull the woman free from these various oppressive forces. Simultaneously, the demonstrators' hands work to keep the banner visible, to keep the woman standing upright and not crumpled in a pile, to exhibit the violence enacted against this body.

[203] The abject has been explored by the feminist theories Julia Kristeva. She explains: "It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." The abject is an occurrence that triggers both aversion and curiosity because it challenges how we understand our world and threatens our existence, rather physically or more often in our imagination.
Julia Kristeva, *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

Hands also constitute a significant feature of the 2019 banner as indicated by the central figure having four arms instead of two. All of her hands are occupied, suggesting that she is taking on more tasks than she can handle, pushing her belaboured body to its limits. The first of the shadowed male figures depicted in sequence at the top of the image, extends his arm out towards the woman's agonized face, suggesting his authority. As the demonstrators support the banner in the street, their hands extend into the picture plane in a similar manner to the 2018 banner. The flesh of the demonstrators' hands more closely resemble the flesh of the woman than the ghostly grey of the male figures, simultaneously allowing the demonstrators' hands to offer support to the woman, but also allowing her body to escape the picture plane while the male figures remain confined to this space which could crumble as soon as the demonstrators unclasp their hands.

2.7 Dana Kavelina, 2019 Banner Created for March 8th Demonstration. Photograph available at the following link: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10161809841785508&set=t.100000216105420&type=3&t heater.

These two figures constitute visual manifestations of Kristine Stiles's "cultures of trauma". She defines this context as "to denote traumatic circumstances manifest in culture—discernable at the intersection of aesthetic, political, and social experience…the task is to undermine its invisibility. For its concealed conditions and silences are the spaces in which destructions of trauma multiply".[204] Cultures of trauma are the culmination of destructive situations manifested in the relations between individuals in any given group. Stiles notes that these manifestations often go unaddressed and that it is imperative to uncover the dynamics at play.[205] Kavelina's banners are products of a culture of trauma where far-right violence,

[204] Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies", 1-2.
[205] Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies", 1-2.

increasing nationalism, and militarism coalesce in the face of conflict and uncertainty. The two banners sit in conversation with one another as the 2019 banner channels the destructive energy directed towards the 2018 banner into a striking illustration of the effects of physical and ideological violence through provocative and disturbing imagery.

Kavelina incorporates destruction into her 2019 banner by visualizing the destructive and caustic context she and her banner operate within, illustrating the unsustainability of these conditions. In his 1961 essay "Foundation for an Aesthetic of Destruction", Argentinian poet Aldo Pellegrini suggests that the role of the artist is to reformulate destruction from a "destruction for destruction's sake" or "destruction driven by hate" into "reveal[ling] the universality of the process of destruction, to cause the term to lose its fearfulness, to cleanse it of its impurities: hate, resentment, egoism".[206] He argues that the artist's job is to transform the meaning of destruction by drawing on the power of the interrelated process of construction. He continues that "to destroy an ugly, monstrous, senseless or false object is to destroy a worm-eaten and anti-human civilization…destruction, for the artist, belongs to the highest order of liberty".[207] In other words, the artist utilizes destruction in their practise in order to remove the oppressive forces inherent in the world and create a space that can be filled with more ethical possibilities. But how does Kavelina propose that these oppressive forces can be overcome and transformed when it appears that the woman in the image is merely suffering?

The proximity of the body on the banner and the bodies of the demonstrators in the parade encourage a relationship between the two. These two bodies stand in contrast to one another: the body on the image is sickly, agonized while the demonstrators appear active and

[206] Aldo Pellegrini, "Foundation for an Aesthetic of Destruction", in *Destruction: Documents of Contemporary Art,* edited by Sven Spieker, (London/Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT Press, 2017), 72-74.
[207] Pellegrini, "Foundation for an Aesthetic of Destruction", 74.

healthy. But these positions could sway either way. The banner challenges the audience by suggesting that the bodies of the demonstrators could morph into the body on the image and in turn, 'she' could emerge from her position into an active, healthy, citizen. This fate depends in part on the larger political, social, economic, and ideological context these women function within—the cultures of trauma—and how destruction will be channelled, laid bare for all to see, and transformed.

By painting an image that responds to a destructive context on a banner that is exhibited in public, space is created around the banner where the dynamics of destruction and production can play out. The march becomes a space where individuals come together to voice their dissatisfaction with contemporary conditions. The banner is foregrounded by the context of the march made explicit through the theatrics of protest. But between the banner, the bodies, and the context of the march lay not only physical but symbolic space. This space mimics the emptiness and debris left after a work of destruction art has been destroyed, the 'space' pregnant with tensions and possibilities, a 'space' between and around oppositions where real lives function—the grey area, the hyphen, the mess. This 'space' surrounding the image, the bodies, and the street is implicated in the image by the black used to compose both the background and the figures. This black of the background constitutes this 'space' that I am suggesting exists in reality. It also constitutes the bodies, allowing the background and foreground to undulate in the image. Just as the background or context forms the figures, the figures also shape the background by functioning within it. The figures can change the very composition of the background depending on who shoots the rifle first: the soldier or the agonized woman?

This space is crucial to how the banner functions because it both heightens and neutralizes the antagonistic relationship on the image. It allows the image to simultaneously

remain a dystopia and transform into a reality depending on the conditions within this 'space'. The narrative on the banner lingers in the tension of this standoff; however, by appearing in the streets, it poses a challenge to onlookers to resolve it. How can the bodies congregated on the street shape the background; does one enemy eliminate the other or do both parties lay down their arms?

Judith Butler engages the concept of space within the context of street protest by interrogating how the public is conceptualized and what power relations are inherent in this formulation. She argues that it is important to interrogate the relationship between the private and the public and not to relegate the private "sexual and laboring, feminine, foreign and mute…pre-political" as unpolitical simply because it may not always be visible in the public domain.[208] In contrast, she suggests that the private is constantly supporting the public, but can intervene in the public domain, making itself visible, especially during certain street protests. Here Butler cites the protests that erupted on Tahrir Square in Egypt, 2011 where individuals began to live on the square, eating and sleeping in the public domain; however, the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine illustrate this argument as well.[209] During the Revolution of Dignity the private spilled onto the public square as citizens rallied together to cook and feed one another, Feminist Ofenzywa organized make-shift medical services in churches as the protests become more violent, and people camped out on the square even after Yanukovych was ousted as president.[210]

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[208] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street", *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies,* September, 2011, np.
[209] Butler, "Bodies in Alliance", np.
[210] Zychowicz *Superfluous Women,* 202; Khromeychuk, "From the Maidan to the Donbas", 50-51.

Although these basic elements of private daily life are not exemplified during the March 8th demonstrations, Kavelina's banners engage in a similar intervention. Both banners transgress the division between private and public by bringing imagery typically confined to the private, the margins, and the 'untimely', to the streets in the centre of the city. The naked female body is made visible, in the instance of the 2019 banner engaged in the even more private act of giving birth, and the invisible forces that have marked these bodies such as the church, the state, and the military are given signifiers. This takes place within a public that is loaded with overlapping layers of context signified by the structures and bodies in this space; structures and bodies that are not neutral by any means such as counter-protesters, state institutions, and the military. Butler elaborates on this point:

> Simply put, the bodies on the street redeploy the space of appearance in order to contest and negate the existing forms of political legitimacy—and just as they sometimes fill or take over public space, the material history of those structures also work on them, and become part of their very action, remaking a history in the midst of its most concrete and sedimented artifices…in wrestling that power, a new space is created, a new "between" of bodies, as it were, that lays claim to existing space through the action of a new alliance, and those bodies are seized and animated by those existing spaces in the very acts by which they reclaim and resignify their meanings.

An interplay is established between the bodies on the street and the contexts in which they are operating as the bodies become shaped by the environment and the environment is in turn given meaning by the bodies. The space of the city and its significance is reconfigured when individuals engaged in the demonstrations fill the street with imagery or actions typically appearing behind the walls of the architecture. The relationships between individuals engaged in protest on the street is shaped by those streets as is the space between the bodies, the architecture, and institutions of power where various forces and ideologies are invisibly engaged. By parading a woman suffering under the forces of patriarchal authority in the public streets of

Kyiv, the banner changes this domain, implicating it in the private lives of citizens and holding it responsible for their well being.

The 2019 banner presents the streets of Kyiv as a dystopic space by situating the suffering woman within its parameters. She was created by and exists within its context, whether this context is defined by increasing polarizing rhetoric in the face of war, the dismissal of a feminist critique and issues of discrimination during national uncertainty, or the lack of justice for victims of sexual violence. Her presence suggests that allowing this context to proliferate has dire consequences, but it does not have to be this way. Situating the banner within the March 8th demonstrations offers solace to this woman as the streets of Kyiv also become shaped by this history of women's resistance through reshaping March 8th. Kavelina implicates the larger public context in the fate of the woman on the banner by making visible both the forces of patriarchy and private embodied experiences. Her hell does not exist merely on the banner but is situated in the streets of Kyiv, in wider Ukrainian society; we should all care about her well being.

The interplay of Kavelina's 2018 and 2019 banners suggest that destruction and production compose two elements in a single process rather than a binary pair. The destruction of the 2018 banner led to the creation of the 2019 banner that brought issues formerly deemed private such as increased sexual violence during war, into the public domain. Simultaneously, "the destruction of images becomes an image of destruction" when I produce my analysis of the destroyed banner, documenting, resurrecting, and animating it once again. [211] Both Kavelina's 2019 banner and my thesis participate in redefining the energy of destruction by participating in the discourse on feminist art and the threat of the far-right in Ukraine. By focusing on the

[211] Groys, "Iconoclasm and the Palace of the Republic, Berlin", 107.

destruction of a feminist art object during a demonstration for women's rights, we are creating space for the voices and bodies that have been affected and censored by the far-right to be heard. Our contributions transform destruction from an oppressive force, as intended by the far-right, into a site of contestation and resistance where the voices of those whom the far-right directly targets are highlighted and refuse to be silenced.

Chapter 3

Embroidering, Puncturing, and Snipping Away as Acts of Resilience and Resistance in Valentyna Petrova's *Self-Portrait*

Imagine walking into an art gallery and coming upon a large embroidered tapestry. The tapestry extends from floor to ceiling and is roughly the same width as a twin-sized bed sheet. An androgynous figure has been embroidered in colourful threads on the bright yellow fabric. Suddenly, a woman dressed as any other visitor approaches the embroidered image with a pair of scissors in hand. She grasps a corner of the tapestry and begins snipping the threads one by one. The gallery attendants do not intervene, signalling that this action is permitted, possibly even part of the work itself. At her feet, the fraying and curling threads begin to accumulate in a colourful heap. What would compel an artist to painstakingly embroider such a large piece and then equally carefully cut away the threads composing the image?

The performance entitled *Self-Portrait* was enacted by the artist Valentyna Petrova as part of the exhibition *TEXTUS: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism* which took place in Kyiv, Ukraine at the Visual Culture Research Centre (VCRC) in 2017.[212] Curated by fellow artist Oksana Briukhovetska, the exhibition opened on March 8th—International Women's Day—joining it with a lineage of feminist art activities that have taken place in Ukraine on this day.[213] Following 1991, artists and activists in Ukraine began collaborating to create safe and productive spaces to discuss feminism and issues of gender discrimination; both Briukhovetska and Petrova participated in several such initiatives most extensively following the Revolution of Dignity and

[212] Tamara Zlobina, "Tapestry "Glory to Labour!"", in *Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, exhibition catalog, (Kyiv, 2017), 105.

[213] The effort of Ukrainian women to reinvest March 8th with political and feminist connotations was discussed in the previous chapter and illustrated by the example of Dana Kavelina's two banners created for March 8th demonstrations in 2018 and 2019.

ousting of former president Viktor Yanukovych in 2014.[214] Briukhovetska co-founded the Visual Culture Research Centre in the 2010s and her efforts helped to establish the organization as an ally of feminist and LGBTQIA+ arts and activist activities.[215] *TEXTUS* was the latest of Briukhovetska's curatorial initiatives engaging with feminist themes, preceded by *The Ukrainian Body* (2012), *What about me is feminine?* (2015), *Motherhood* (2015), and followed by the collectively curated *I am a Ukrainian Woman* poster campaign in Warsaw, Poland (2018).[216]

TEXTUS was organized as a project for artists to interrogate societal expectations of femininity through the traditionally domestic and feminine medium of textiles.[217] In her curatorial statement, Briukhovetska explains the Latin etymology of the term *TEXTUS* translated as fabric, connection, and interweaving; the root of the terms textile and text.[218] She elaborates on the gendered implications of these two terms, text and textile, as the process of "interweaving words", intellectual work, became valued over the "interweaving of threads", domestic and physical work.[219] By challenging the connotation of textiles with domestic or

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[214] Briukhovetska participated in the feminist art and activism initiative *Women's Work Unit* organized by Nataliya Tschermalykh and Feminist Ofenzywa. It took place at the VCRC in 2012. The event was a horizontally structured workshop where artists, curators, and visitors could gather and collaborate in art making and consciousness raising activities. The workshop sought to recognize "women artists' productive and reproductive labour" and this included both small honorariums for the artists and a kindergarten space so that artists would not be excluded from participating due to child-care activities.
Olenka Dmytryk, ""I'm a Feminist Therefore…": The Art of Gender and Sexual Dissent in 2010s Ukraine and Russia", *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies* 2, 1 (2016): 150-156.
Petrova performed the work "A postcard for your memories" in the exhibition *What about me is feminine?* (2015) curated by Oksana Briukhovetska. Subsequently, Petrova and Bruikhovetska worked together with a larger collective in the *Я Українка* poster campaign in Warsaw, Poland 2018.
Briukhovetska, Oksana. "Жінка та її тіло [The Woman and Her Body]. *Political Critique* (December 15, 2015): 1-6. https://politkrytyka.org/2015/12/15/zhinka-ta-yiyi-tilo/.
[215] Dmytryk, ""I'm a Feminist Therefore…"", 157-158.
[216] Natalia Martynenko, "Як вишити фемінізм: Схеми і текніки" [How to Embroider Feminism: Patterns and Techniques], *Feminist Critique: The Eastern European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies* 1 (2018): 111.
[217] Martynenko, "Як вишити фемінізм", 111.
[218] Oksana Briukhovetska, "Textus", *Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, exhibition catalog, (Kyiv, 2017), 95.
[219] Briukhovetska, "Textus", 95.

practical women's work and submission into gender roles, Briukhovetska posits that the exhibition "rais[es] issues such as women's rights in Ukraine and the post-Soviet space, women's labour, and identity…the exhibition can be seen as documentation of women's everyday lives and at the same time a form of women's solidarity".[220] Engaging with the varied history of textile production in Ukraine through the exploration of contemporary themes, the exhibition created space to explore textile's subversive potential and reshape intellectual endeavours as contingent upon the process of making.[221]

Petrova offered an unconventional approach to the challenge of working with textiles, utilizing destruction as a creative technique in her work *Self Portrait.* In preparation for the performance, Petrova embroidered a portrait of herself in the evenings after she returned home from her paid job, using only second-hand material and threads donated by friends and family or supplemented by the gallery.[222] After hanging the tapestry in the gallery, Petrova reversed this process and visited the gallery to gradually pull out the threads. She continued this process until all that remained was the yellow sheet perforated with holes and a pile of colourful threads on the floor.[223] *Self-Portrait* involves the interplay of tapestry and performance-based practise by bringing an object that is singular in its existence into the gallery in a traditional manner, and then unravelling the tradition leaving only the constituent parts.

Following the long-standing tradition of performance-based art, Petrova emphasizes her commitment to creating "non-object art" that resists integration into the art market and

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[220] Briukhovetska, "Textus", 96.
[221] Martynenko, "Як вишити фемінізм", 111; Solveigh Goett, "Materials, Memories, and Metaphors: The Textile Self Re/collected", in *The Handbook of Textile Culture,* edited by Janis Jeffries, Diana Wood Conroy, and Hazel Clark, 121-136, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).
[222] Valentyna Petrova, "Self-Portrait", *Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, (Kyiv, 2017), exhibition catalog, 24.
[223] Petrova, "Self-Portrait", 24.

commodification. [224] She elaborates the distinction between "objectless art" and performance in an interview with Anna Kravets and Oksana Briukhovetska as "the absence of an object (by object I don't just mean material things, a performance can be sold) is a lack of precise frameworks and definitions, which makes market relations impossible or at least more difficult" and in contrast, performance as a technique "create[s] a situation where [the artist] interacts with the audience or vice versa. It is a space with no rules or just a general framework".[225] Petrova situates her work as ephemeral and conceptual, based on the experience of a scenario that she creates with her body, one that cannot be packaged as a commodified art object. She does not aim to create an art-object or performance that can be reproduced but provokes interactions that

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[224] Oksana Briukhovetska and Lesia Kulchynska, eds, *Право на істину: розмови про мистецтво і фемінізм* [The Right to Truth: Conversations on Art and Feminism], (Kyiv, 2019), 24.
Performance-based discourses in North America and Europe that emerged in the 1960s were founded upon a desire to create an artform that could resist commodification through its ephemerality, notably exemplified by Fluxus and Happenings. Happenings, coined by artist Allan Kaprow, involved the creation of loosely structured events and their sets that drew on painting and sculpture, but rendered them temporary and fleeting. Fluxus expressed their anti-capitalist foundation more explicitly, as evident in the 1963 Fluxus Manifesto that read "Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional, and commercialized culture…promote living art, anti-art, promote non-art reality that can be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilletantes, and professionals." Within the twenty-first century, Gregory Sholette has once again raised concerns over the relationship between capital and art, arguing that it is necessary to reconsider how socially engaged art functions in a time of capitalist crisis.
Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: activist art and the crisis of capitalism,* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
George Maciunas, "Fluxus Manifesto", 1963, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127947.
Julia Robinson, "Happening", *Grove Art Online,* October 27, 2011.
Throughout the Cold War period and into the 1990s and 2000s, artists continued to engage the fleeting, live, and often participatory dimension of performance-based practises, challenging the relationship between the artist, audience, and art object. In these works that Claire Bishop refers to as "participatory art", the artist and audience are reconceptualized as collaborators and the art object an event, situation, or project. See Claire Bishop, Bishop, *Artificial Hells: participatory art and the politics of spectatorship,* (London: Verso, 2012).
Art historian Amy Bryzgel notes that performance art developed in the countries under the former sphere of influence of the Soviet Union in parallel to developments in the rest of Europe and North America. The artists "used the art they encountered from the West as a resource, not a source", and created performances incorporating local traditions and responding to their specific socio-political contexts, although this did not mean their art was inherently political or critical. Performance-based practises varied in each country; a tight control of the arts was evident in the countries of the former Soviet Union and artistic experiments of the 1960s were largely limited to painting and sculpture with performance emerging (albeit marginally) in the 1970s. Bryzgel cites very few examples of performance art in Ukraine within her text and suggests that although archives of these events remain, a critical discourse on performance did not form.
Amy Bryzgel, *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).
[225] Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, "The Right to Truth", 24.

are situated within a specific place and time.[226] In Ukraine where performance-based practises are not taught or fostered in academic art programs, Petrova's articulation of the anti-capitalist basis of objectless art illustrates a local engagement with performance art discourse and situated possibilities of the medium.[227]

Petrova's embodied engagement with the constituent materials of *Self-Portrait* is an essential component of the work as she stitches, unravels, and cuts apart the tapestry. In this chapter, I analyze the Petrova's seen and unseen labour both producing and destroying the work and situate it within a history of Ukrainian embroidery production and feminist textile praxis that emphasizes the intellectual and theoretical dimensions of working with textiles. I argue that the gestures of the artist's body connect her with lineages of embroidery production in Ukrainian history created under conditions of political oppression and economic crisis, but that she shapes her present and defies oppression by utilizing destruction. The destructive act permeates every thread of the artwork, disrupting relationships between artists and textile producers, illustrating labour, and criticizing structures such as capitalism that forcibly or latently coerce women into certain occupations. My analysis of *Self-Portrait* lingers in the tension between embroidering for pleasure and necessity, neither privileging one over the other by suggesting that both allow

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[226] Petrova's desire to create ephemeral performances that hold their significance in the live moment resonate with a rich discourse on performance and documentation. Peggy Phelan is a prominent voice in this discourse and argues that any attempt to document and replicate a performance, whether it be recordings, photographs, or written description, alter the event and aim to preserve it. She states that this drive is antithetical to the purpose of performance itself. Reflecting on Phelan's position, I believe it is important to state that my analysis is based on photographic documentation and a brief video of *Self-Portrait* and may have been very different had I access to the live performance-based work in 2017.
Peggy Phelan, "The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction", in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance,* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146-166.

[227] Maria Kulikovska, interview with Kalyna Somchynsky, August 22, 2019. Kulikovska articulated the absence of performance in the artistic pedagogy of fine art academies in Ukraine. As evident within this thesis, contemporary artists are engaging with performance-based practises within their circles, gallery spaces, and education abroad. Prominent galleries such as Pinchuk Art Centre in Kyiv and Dzyga Art Centre in L'viv host international performance-based artists and hold lectures on the topic, as was evident during my visits to these galleries over the course of my research.

women to utilize the medium as a complex mechanism to navigate adverse circumstances. In the process, *Self-Portrait* demonstrates an engaged and expanded feminist ethic and embroiders multi-dimensional social relationships.

To Textile, To Whirl, To Feminism

The relationship between textile, gender, and art are as intricately interwoven as the threads in a tapestry. Feminist scholars have been drawn to the medium due to its traditionally feminine connotations of domesticity, gender roles, and craft production, problematizing these relationships and the agency of the individuals working with textiles. Roszika Parker was a forerunner in the field, exploring the history of embroidery and its gendered implication in the division of art and craft, masculinity and femininity, the professional and the domestic in her germinal text *The Subversive Stitch*.[228] Recently, scholars and artists in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom have turned their attention to how second and third wave feminists are revisiting forms of textile production, such as knitting, as forms of activism and revolt through the tendency of "craftivism".[229] Although the explicit discussion of feminism and its relationship to textiles is dominated by Western discourses, it is important to note global research exploring how individuals employ textiles to address interweaving issues of gender, class,

[228] Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), xii.

[229] See the following selected, but not exhaustive, list of scholars and artists exploring craftivism and third wave feminism: Beth Ann Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting: Are the Fibre Arts a Viable Mode for Feminist Political Action", *Thirdspace: A Journal of Feminist Theory and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2008): np; Jack Z. Bratich and Heidi M. Brush, "Fabricating Activism: Craft-Work, Popular Culture, Gender", *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 233-260.; Brenda Schmahmann, "Intertextual Textiles: Parodies and Quotations in Cloth", *Textile: Cloth and Culture* 15, 4 (2017): 336-343. Ricia A. Chansky, "A Stitch in Time: Third-Wave Feminist Reclamation of Needled Imagery", *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 4 (2010): 681-700.

conflict, nationalism, oppression, and resistance.[230] Textile production does not have to be associated with a feminist, or even political movement, to be worthy of study by feminist scholars as the complex ways it straddles the home and the market, pleasure and profit, and personal and political make it a medium full of radical potential. *Self-Portrait* engages with the lively feminist discourse in contemporary Ukraine and stands in conversation with a complex and often contradictory history of embroidery and textile production.[231] Embracing the

[230] See the following articles for a few examples where textile has been used to explore national identity, women's rights within human rights protests, and the trauma of World War II: Magdalena Buchczyk, "To Weave or Not to Weave: Vernacular Textiles and Historical Change in Romania", *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 12, 3 (2014): 328-345; Maria Alina Asavei, "The Politics of Textiles in the Romanian Contemporary Art Scene", *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture,* 17, 3 (2019): 246-258; Cecilia Nowell, "In Chile, Women Use Traditional Embroidery to Urge Political Change", *Public Radio International,* February 21, 2020, https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-02-21/chile-women-use-traditional-embroidery-urge-political-change; Marta Kowalewska, Michał Jachuła, and Irena Huml, "The Polish School of Textile Art", *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture,* 16, 4 (2018): 412-419.

[231] The history of textile production in Ukraine has been studied from ethnographic, art historical, anthropologic, and economic perspectives. Below is a brief history and further readings on the topic. The production of embroidery and weaving—often considered 'folk art' or 'народне мистецтво'—was generally produced by women in the home for cultural, religious, and symbolic purposes. For example, embroidered *rushnyky* were placed over icons, doors, and windows to keep evil spirits away from the house. Many of these rituals continue today. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was common for there to be an embroidery specialist or artisan in every village who sold both their products and their skills to other villagers.
Demian Horniatkevych and Liidia Nenadkevych, "Embroidery", *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine,* originally appeared in the printed form, Vol. 1, 1984, http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CE%5CM%5CEmbroidery.htm.
Oksana Kis', "Жінка в традиційні українській культурі друга половина XIX-початок XX ст." [Women in traditional Ukrainian culture in the second half of the 19th-early 20th centuries], (L'viv: Institute of Ethnography in Ukraine, 2008).
Embroidery retained its ritual and cultural function, but was also commercialized due in part to the rise of the Arts and Crafts Movement, interest in ethnography and the diverse peasant cultures within the Russian Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empire, and a drive by prominent members of the Avant-Garde such as Alexandra Exter, Kazimir Malevich, and Evgenia Prybil'skaia to establish workshops that taught embroidery and weaving while incorporating Avant-Garde designs. The most prominent of these workshops were Verbovka and Skoptsy.
Natalia Murray, "Great Female Artists of the Avant-Garde: From Embroidery to The Revolution", in *Soviet Women and Their Art: The Spirit of Equality,* edited by Katia Kapushesky, (London: Unicorn Publishing Group LLP, 2019),21-38; Alla Myzelev, "Handcrafting Revolution: Ukrainian avant-garde embroidery and the meanings of history", *Craft Research* 3 (2012): 11-32.
Following the First World War, these efforts were enacted on a larger scale as products were created for export on the international market. In Soviet Ukraine, both cooperatives and state formed workshops were established, while in Western Ukraine, cooperatives were formed by the initiative of cultural institutions. One example is Ukrainske Narodne Mystetstvo, established in L'viv 1922. The cooperative sold folk art, embroidered items, woven kilims, and carvings in their storefronts and organized exhibitions abroad. The production of folk art continued during the Soviet period under Stalin's "National in Form, Socialist in Content" policy. I have struggled to find

aforementioned tensions, Petrova sews solidarities and collaborations through the medium of textiles, opening possibilities to explore how we can learn from the labour we undertake.

Textile theorist Julia Bryan-Wilson argues in her book *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* that textile production is an exercise that gives form to alternative ways of relating to one another. Bryan-Wilson uses the term textile to refers broadly to needle-based techniques such as knitting, to the mass-production of clothing and fabric, although she emphasizes that it is important to consider the implications and histories of individual techniques.[232] I choose the term over "textile" over "domestic arts" or "craft work" because these latter terms imply a hierarchy between "art" and "craft" and situate the production of certain textiles in the home and private sphere.[233] Textile production leaves room to explore the tensions between art and craft, the private and the public, gender, labour, and capitalism, suggesting that these interactions are

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sources on this policy in Ukraine, although I assume the situation is similar to Estonia where the products officially produced featured generalized embroidery patterns that ignored regional diversity and specificity.
Phillip Herzog, ""National in Form and Socialist in Content" or rather "Socialist in Form and National in Content"? The "Amateur Art System" and the Cultivation of "Folk Art" in Soviet Estonia", *Nar. Umjet,* 47, 1 (2010): 115-140.
"Ukrainske Narodnie Mystetstvo", *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, originally appeared in the print form Vol. 5, 1993, http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainskeNarodnieMystetstvo.htm.
Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, textile production in Ukraine has been studied from the perspective of economics and human rights as international fashion brands began establishing factories within the country. Within the last few years, this industry has faced criticism for its extremely low wages, often paying the primarily female labour force less than minimum wage, requiring unrealistic quotas, poorly temperature regulated working conditions, and exploitations and coercion of workers. These conditions are only expected to get worse with the outbreak of COVID-19 globally.
Oksana Dutchak, "Big brands and cheap clothes in the West are bad news for Ukrainian workers", *Opendemocracy.net*, July 7, 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-global-brands-cheap-clothing/; Oksana Dutchak, Artem Chapeye, and Bettina Musiolek, "Country Profile: Ukraine", *Clean Clothes Campaign,* 2017, https://cleanclothes.org/file-repository/livingwage-europe-country-profiles-ukraine/view.
[232] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Arts and Textile Politics,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 4.
[233] Bratich and Brush, "Fabricating Activism: Craft-Work, Popular Culture, Gender", 234; Beth Ann Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting: Are the Fibre Arts a Viable Mode for Feminist Political Action", *Thirdspace: A Journal of Feminist Theory and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2008): np.

contingent upon historical contexts. Bryan-Wilson articulates this point by presenting the term "textile politics" thus:

> Not only to suggest how textiles have been used to advance political agendas but also to indicate a procedure of making politics material: *textile* as a transitive verb…to textile politics is to *give texture* to politics, to refuse easy binaries, to acknowledge complications: textured…as in tangibly worked and retaining some of the grain of that labour.[234]

The concept of "textile politics" as a verb encapsulates the fluid, situated, and occasionally contradictory relationships that form between textile production, culture, and gender. It harnesses the materiality of textiles as a tool to consider the tightly interwoven actors at play within an object's production and gives them tangible form—whether visual or embodied. These actors such as governments, companies, workers, and artists create meaning, structures, and hierarchies in the act of production.

Textile metaphors have been studied by textile artists and scholars as sites of praxis where the embodied knowledge of making informs the theoretical potential of the phrase. This relationship between theory and practise encapsulated within certain phrases have been studied by scholars such as Solveigh Goett and Tania Peréz-Bustos in collaboration with Eliana Sánchez-Aldana, and Alexandra Chocontá-Piraquive.[235] Peréz-Bustos, Sánchez-Aldana, and Chocontá-Piraquive argue that it is important to study textile metaphors with a consideration of embodied knowledge gained from working with textiles to both explore the nuances of these terms and assert the importance of making in academia.[236] Textile metaphors such as social fabric have become standard in the English language vernacular and used in various contexts.

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[234] Bryan-Wilson, *Fray*, 7.
[235] Tania Peréz-Bustos, Eliana Sánchez-Aldana, and Alexandra Chocontá-Piraquive, "Textile Material Metaphors to Describe Feminist Textile Activisms: From Threading Yarn, to Knitting, to Weaving Politics", *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 17, no. 4 (2019): 370.; Solveigh Goett, "Materials, Memories, and Metaphors: The Textile Self Re/collected", in *The Handbook of Textile Culture,* edited by Janis Jeffries, Diana Wood Conroy and Hazel Clark, 121-136, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
[236] Peréz-Bustos, Sánchez-Aldana, and Chocontá-Piraquive, "Textile Material Metaphors", 370.

For example, Beth-Ann Pentney uses the phrase to reconsider how feminism functions within a North American setting. She asserts that feminism is a practise that has become "part of the contemporary North American social fabric, rather than a necessarily reactive political movement".[237] Can feminism be considered part of the social fabric of Ukraine if we consider Peréz-Bustos, Sánchez-Aldana, and Chocontá-Piraquive's methodological proposition in combination with Bryan-Wilson's assertion that social fabric is textiled? Is there more to the phrase social fabric than the implication that social values, ethics, or principles are interwoven seamlessly into the actions and mentality of a given group? What happens to the phrase when we take into account where the materials, the fabric, our bodies and minds engage with originate and whose bodies worked to produce them?

I take up Peréz-Bustos, Sánchez-Aldana, Chocontá-Piraquive challenge to explore textile metaphors with knowledge gained by working with textiles. They assert that "being aware of this interference—of textile-making in our thinking on textile makings—is a call to become responsible for what these textile metaphors have to offer in our understanding of these knowledge practises".[238] The term social fabric will be my starting point to unravel how thinking about the composition and production of fabric from personal experience complicates the term's common meaning and theoretical potential. By no means do I practise textile arts; however, I have dabbled and learned about these practises over my lifetime mainly due to my Ukrainian-Canadian upbringing. Two of my aunts are embroiderers who have taught me basic stitches and the Ukrainian bilingual educational programs in Edmonton incorporate embroidery and weaving into their art curriculums. I can make a few assertions about textile production through my

[237] Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting", np.
[238] Peréz-Bustos, Sánchez-Aldana, and Chocontá-Piraquive, "Textile Material Metaphors", 370.

limited engagement with the practises of embroidery and weaving, my experience working in The Ukrainian Museum of Canada Alberta Branch, rich with textiles, and drawing on Petrova's practise. Textiles are created from multiple threads that most likely originate from multiple sources such as Petrova's embroidery threads that were donated by friends and purchased. When cloth is woven, the material is harvested from multiple plants to acquire the needed quantity to produce linen, hemp, or cotton. Wool is harvested from multiple sheep and dyes sourced from different plants, berries, minerals, and chemicals. Individuals in a community share resources with one another and purchase goods from the store that may have originated from across the world. A piece of fabric is composed of multiple parts, with diverse origins, made over time. Some pieces may be stitched together to form a whole, while other pieces lay incomplete. It can fray over time or grow larger, become reinforced, mended, or wear down.

Transferring this knowledge to the phrase social fabric complicates its spatial and temporal implications. Social fabric is never stable or cohesive, but always being added on to and textiled. The social fabric of a society may achieve the appearance of cohesion although it is made of disparate parts. If these disparate parts are individual threads, they continually weave and knot around one another, touching one another as the fabric is folded and piled together. The social fabric is always in the process of being made, undone, rewoven, and sewn together. Considering the composition of a piece of physical fabric accounts for historical continuities, discontinuities, and contradictions. The individual parts touch, support, and compose one another. When something composes the social fabric, such as feminism, it can exist with synergies and dissonances. Conceptualizing feminism as a process that is textiled opens space for feminist art to engage with a wider set of concerns as demonstrated by Petrova within *Self-Portrait.*

Considering textile and social fabric as both mediums and verbs—conceptual tools to rethink the operation of the medium—encompasses the breadth of research emerging on the relationship between gender, feminism, and textile production across the globe. It leaves space for the specific character of these relationships in the individual contexts in which they emerge. Redi Koobak contributes to this discourse by conceptualizing feminism as a verb in the post-Socialist space. Koobak analyzes what an embodied feminism as verb may look and feel like:

> If feminism were a verb, I would want it to be dancing. I want it to be whirling, spinning, twirling. I want feminism to draw us more towards the processual, the grounded but open part of ourselves and find ways to get ourselves out of the hierarchically situated, fixating positions that lock us in. We need to be able to dance, to whirl, to acknowledge a more mindful participation in the shared revolution of other beings.[239]

Koobak posits feminism as a process of relating to others that is responsive and dynamic. It interacts with other bodies ethically, sewing meaningful relationships in new and considerate ways. This conception of feminism also considers it as a playful activity that is liberating while also a struggle; a way of learning to interact with the world through different embodied practises. It recognizes the complexity of the tapestry and develops new stitches to bring its often incoherent and stubborn threads into mutually beneficial compositions.

What does feminism as a verb mean when Petrova sews and destroys the tapestry? How does she suggest ethical ways of being with others as she textiles the work of art? Petrova's engagement with the tapestry she created simultaneously joins together and rips apart, contributing to a piece of fabric, a social fabric, with needle and scissors just as productively as the interaction of threads. Even as she creates discontinuities within a tapestry by tearing away some of its constituent parts, she accentuates the remaining textile with holes, marking the fabric

[239] Redi Koobak, *Whirling Stories: Postsocialist Feminist Imaginaries and the Visual Arts,* (Sweden: Linköping Studies in Art and Science, 2013), 23.

with the materials used to create it. Her integration of embroidery with an embodied and ephemeral performance-based element incorporates her critical engagement with feminism into the history of a medium that has both reinforced notions of femininity and been utilized to negotiate patriarchal political systems historically.

Sewing and Unravelling Traditions

Self Portrait complicates several narratives historically associated with upholding masculine and feminine forms of artistic expression such as the division between "high" and "low" art, the public and private, and nationalist formulations of femininity; however, the work most significantly addresses how women have appropriated embroidery to navigate difficult circumstances. The medium has functioned as a form of emotional, cultural, and economic survival for women who drew on its symbolic and sentimental value to their advantage as exemplified by female political prisoners in the Soviet GULAG and women facing economic hardship in post-Soviet Ukraine. Petrova draws on the tradition of embroidery in Ukrainian society to question the patriarchal and corrupt social and economic conditions that continue to subject women to conditions of oppression and refuses to participate in their dynamics.

Embroidery has been practised in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries for hundreds of years, changing and being adapted by different social groups through out this time and into the present. In Ukrainian folk culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, embroidery was regarded as a common and important creative preoccupation of young women, especially for women of the peasant class living in the villages. Oksana Kis' notes the embroidery patterns and motifs were often passed on from older generations or shared amongst social networks,

indicating the transmission of traditions rather than innovation.[240] During this period, women were especially encouraged to embroider in the period between matchmaking and marriage.[241] It was customary for women to fill a chest (скриня) as part of their dowry with embroidered *rushnyky*, shirts, and handkerchiefs to be gifted to the families of their future husbands and also produce the required embroidery for the marriage ceremony itself.[242] Women of all ages participated in the sewing and embroidery of clothing for important religious holidays, weaving, *kylym* making, and decoration of the home with these textile arts.[243] Although learning to embroider as a gendered right of passage has lost its social significance, the practise of embroidery maintained aesthetic, social, and ritual functions throughout the twentieth century and into the present, being adapted to changing cultural and individual circumstances.

Petrova recalls the tradition of embroidery as a female preoccupation within *Self-Portrait* but shapes the technique, content, and intent to respond to contemporary concerns such as women's economic and emotional labour. I use the term tradition by drawing on Lynda Nead's articulation of the term to describe the female nude in art history. She defines tradition as:

> In the transmission and acceptance of statements, beliefs, rules and customs that constitute tradition, there is also always a relinquishing or surrendering of alternatives. Tradition sets in place a history, a narrative that carries with it the authority of cultural continuity whilst also allowing (in fact, requiring) the possibilities of innovation.[244]

Nead stresses that as traditions are passed down from older generations or incorporated into cultural practises they inherently transform in creative ways. The practise of embroidering in

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[240] Oksana Kis', "Жінка в традиційні українській культурі друга половина XIX-початок XX ст." [Women in traditional Ukrainian culture in the second half of the 19th-early 20th centuries], (L'viv: Institute of Ethnography in Ukraine, 2008), 160.
[241] Oksana Kis', "Жінка в традиційні українській культурі", 161.
[242] Oksana Kis', "Жінка в традиційні українській культурі", 161.
[243] A *kylym* is a thickly woven tapestry often hung on the walls or used as a bedspread.
Oksana Kis', "Жінка в традиційні українській культурі", 160-161.
[244] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 44.

Ukraine embodies this process as women have used the medium for diverse means such as maintaining rituals, entertainment, and emotional and economic sustenance. Its historical connotations are woven into the threads as it is continually re-employed for different purposes.

I will draw on two examples in Ukrainian history where women have utilized the practise of embroidering to navigate adverse circumstances: women surviving in the GULAG system and women adapting to a capitalist economic system following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each example highlights how women have formed subjective relationships with the practise and medium, transforming the tradition into a strategy of resistance. They contextualize *Self-Portrait* as the continuation of an embroidery tradition mobilized by women to soften the struggles they face in their daily lives while also acknowledging that this relationship oscillates between necessity and pleasure. While some women may embroider as a form of creative expression, others may do so because there is a market demand they can satisfy for income. These contradictory applications of textile for pleasure and for profit do not have to be reconciled; they can exist simultaneously in a social fabric that is in the process of being woven. Together they make up a tradition of embroidery that is not linear, but a web of interconnected parts. The points of tension that cause the fabric to wrinkle are part of the composition

Oksana Kis' study of women in the GULAG illustrates how embroidery can exemplify both conformity to notions of femininity and function as a mechanism of resistance to the totalitarianism of the Soviet system. The GULAG was a forced labour prison system created by the Soviet regime to punish any dissidents, critics, and real or imagined enemies of the Soviet Union.[245] The most severe repressions against any form of Ukrainian nationalist, political, or

[245] Oksana Kis', "Українки в гулагу: вижити значить перемогти" [Ukrainian women in the Gulag: to survive means to overcome], (Львів: Національна академія наук України, інститиут народоснавства, 2017) 9.

religious activity occurred during Stalin's totalitarian rule from the early 1930s-1953 and this is when the Gulag housed the largest number of political prisoners.[246]

In her book *Ukrainian Women in the Gulag: To Survive Means to Overcome* (Українки в гулагу: вижити значить перемогти), Oksana Kis' explores the various forms of creative activity women engaged in during their imprisonment, one example being embroidery. In the GULAG, women creatively sourced materials from the meagre items they had available to them. They would take apart old rags and unravel electrical cables from the mines for thread, crafted needles out of fishbones and matchsticks, and tore apart bed sheets for material.[247] Kis' notes that embroidery did not serve a practical purpose, but rather a cultural and social form of survival in the GULAG.[248] Women would embroider small pieces of cloth and gift them to one another, forging sisterhood and solidarity in the camps. They also embroidered items for those with higher privileges in the camps or the wives of guards in exchange for fabric and thread, more free time, or better food rations.[249] She argues that the traditional women's preoccupation of embroidering served a new function in the GULAG as it reinforced a national, religious, and gendered identity at the same time as it forged social bonds between prisoners and functioned as a resource for survival.[250] It mobilized a different form of labour in the GULAG, providing a counterpoint to the forced and punitive manual labour with the intricate, creative, and voluntary labour of embroidering.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, women once again turned to embroidery as a mechanism of survival, although in this example the relationship between pleasure and necessity

[246] Kis',"Українки в гулагу", 9.
[247] Kis',"Українки в гулагу", 170.
[248] Kis',"Українки в гулагу", 171.
[249] Kis', "Українки в гулагу", 172.
[250] Kis', "Українки в гулагу", 172.

is less clear. During the Soviet period, embroidery was primarily circulated among social networks in an informal exchange economy, exemplifying its ritual and symbolic value to certain segments of the population.[251] For example, when my parents visited Ukraine in the late Soviet period, our relatives gifted them hand-embroidered *rushnyky* and pillows that were then incorporated into our home in Canada. The collapse of the Soviet Union ushered economic turmoil in Ukraine through the "shock therapy" of transforming a communist economy into a capitalist system seemingly overnight. This sudden transition had several negative social and economic repercussions on the population such increasing poverty and unemployment, falling wages, a drop in life expectancy, decline of the middle-class, and an unequal distribution of wealth.[252] Within this context, individuals, especially women and the elderly, began selling new and used embroidery or working as seamstresses to earn an income. This phenomenon was explored within the video *Liubov Leonidivna*, exhibited in *TEXTUS*, featuring a woman who turned to sewing and embroidery after the fall of the Soviet Union to support her family, not because she derived pleasure from the practise.[253]

The demand for embroidered items increased in post-Soviet Ukraine as the country worked to forge an independent national identity. Folk dress derived from the peasant culture of the nineteenth and twentieth century mentioned above was worn for celebrations such as Independence Day, Christmas, Easter, and the beginning of the school year. One of the main features of folk dress was the embroidered shirt. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine opened to tourism and hand-embroidered items were sought after by tourists and members of the

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[251] Natalia Tymchyshyn, personal communication. August 30, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.
[252] Dieter Segert, "The Dissolution of the Soviet Union and its Consequences", in *Crises in the post-Soviet spaces: from the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the conflict in Ukraine*, edited by Tina Olteanu, Felix Jaitner, and Tobias Spöri, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 29.
[253] Iryna Kudria, "Liubov Leonidivna", *Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, exhibition catalog, (Kyiv, 2017), 13.

Ukrainian diaspora. The high regard for Ukrainian embroidery has only been amplified throughout independent Ukraine and is evident on the streets of Ukraine's major cities in the present.

Embroidery continues to function as a popular commodity that has been adapted for mass-production, tourism, and a younger generation of individuals looking for a contemporary take on the tradition. The city centres of Ukraine's major cities are punctuated with folk-inspired embroidery motifs adorning garments, storefronts, and even plastic shopping bags. Open air markets, souvenir stands, and boutique folk-art shops line the streets selling both machine-made and hand-embroidered shirts, dresses, *rushnyky*, table clothes, and serviettes in an array of patterns and colours. These markets and shops range in scale from the kiosks and multi-level stores of *Folkmart*—an artsy souvenir chain—to the elderly selling second-hand goods laid out on tablecloths covering the ground. The outdoors markets are noted for the plethora of hand-embroidered items hanging on makeshift walls or laid on stone ledges where the mostly female artisans who produced them try to entice passers-by into a purchase. Amongst the freshly embroidered items, elderly women sell blouses, *rushnyky*, and aprons from decades past, most likely derived from their own family collections. These handmade "vintage" items sell for a fraction the cost of a mass-produced *rushnyk* from a souvenir kiosk.

Although the streets of Kyiv and L'viv advertise a vibrant folk culture, a darker reality lies behind the surface. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent social and economic transformation led to "crisis prone societal formations" that formed conditions where violent conflict could more easily erupt, as exemplified by the current situation in Ukraine.[254]

[254] Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu, and Tobias Spöri, "Crises in the post-Soviet space: From the dissolution of the Soviet Union to an area of 'intersecting crises phenomenon'?", in *Crises in the post-Soviet spaces: from the dissolution of*

The war in the Donbas region and annexation of Crimea have only exacerbated these conditions. In the last five years, Ukraine has witnessed continued economic turmoil, a growing gap in inequality, and an increasing number of migrant labourers moving temporarily and permanently to neighbouring countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Italy. These individuals often begin working illegally without being subject to local labour regulations in manual work such as cleaning, fruit picking, assembly line factory work, and construction. The elderly continue to face devastating economic conditions with extremely low pensions for those who did not have stable employment.[255] A large number of seniors are forced to beg or sell flowers and fruit picked from local gardens to supplement their income. It is these elderly women who can be found selling second-hand embroidery on the streets.

Embroidery has been subject to a diverse history in Ukraine as individuals continue to engage the tradition to adapt to various circumstances. For the women in the GULAG, embroidery was a form of individual expression, pleasure, and relationship building in a context where they were regarded as the collective identity of enemies of the state. Simultaneously, it also functioned as a form of survival both emotionally to access greater resources. In post-Soviet Ukraine, many women began selling either their own hand-embroidered creations or second-hand embroidery for profit often not out of desire, but desperation. In contrast, some women continue to embroider and design clothing, adapting traditional designs with contemporary fashions as artistic endeavors. These examples demonstrate a lineage of women working with embroidery to psychologically or economically survive turbulent and oppressive systems. How

the Soviet Union to the conflict in Ukraine, edited by Tina Olteanu, Felix Jaitner, and Tobias Spöri, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 4.

[255] Natalia Tymchyshyn, personal communication. August 30, 2019, L'viv, Ukraine.

does Petrova continue this tradition and transform embroidery into a testament of feminist resistance?

The Bodies Composing the Tapestry

A portrait composed of thick, colourful threads embroidered on bright yellow fabric hangs suspended from the ceiling of the gallery space. The individual stitches form large planes of colour delineating eyes, a nose, lips, eyebrows, the contours of a face, and the tip of an ear while the surface of the sheet becomes integrated into the foreground of the portrait as skin. If not for the indication in the title—*Self-Portrait*—that this is a portrait of Petrova herself, the face reads as androgynous and relies on basic skeletal structures to convey human form. Petrova has chosen not to embroider hair nor a body, emphasizing the most recognizable and physiological elements of the face. As the threads stitch into the yellow fabric, they bring the background of the fabric into the foreground of the portrait, playing with the natural movement of the material. The width of the fabric tapers as it nears the floor from the weight and tension of the threads, emphasizing the natural structure of the face; from the jaw into the chin and neck the skeletal structure narrows. Below the figure's bottom lip, the planes of colour transform into a thin outline of the chin and neck that dissipate into the yellow fabric swaying in the gallery space.

3.1 Valentyna Petrova, *Self-Portrait*, 2017, Tapesty and Performance. Used with permission from the artist.

The material interaction of the threads and the fabric brings the portrait to life, increasing its dimensionality and presence in the gallery. The process of poking the material and pulling through the thread has caused the yellow sheet to pucker and pleat between the planes of colour, creating the effect of wrinkles and dimples on the surface of the face. The folds and creases of the unpressed sheet accentuate this effect, simulating fine lines and pores. Upon the surface of the fabric, the planes of embroidery create the illusion of depth, moulding a face from their undulating stiches. The embroidery is most dense in the upper plane of the image around the

figure's eyes forming shadows along the tear trough, soft bags under the eyes, and the curves of raised cheek bones. Gradually, the planes become narrower and disperse along the figure's cheeks and jaw, except for plump red lips accentuated by soft shadows. The increasingly minimal stitches in the lower plane of the image foreshadow its impending destruction at the hand of Petrova's living body.

The slow and purposeful destruction of the embroidered component of the tapestry highlights the relationship between the materiality of the tapestry and Petrova's flesh. Everyday, Petrova visited her tapestry in the gallery, grasped the yellow fabric, and began snipping the threads one by one. She filled the space where the figure's neck disappeared into the yellow sheet, anchoring the floating head with her own body. At the end of each session, the portrait became more obscured as the facial features were slowly relegated to a formless heap on the floor. Simultaneously, an alternative self-portrait of Petrova emerged in this interaction as the destroyed representation of Petrova was substituted by her physical body. The performance-based component of the work doubles the self-portrait as the artist appears next to her representation and replaces it with her active, dynamic, living self. Her body emerges as constituent to the work itself but transcends both the performance and art-object, continuing to create and destroy outside the parameters of the art event.

The interplay of creation and destruction upon a portrait of Petrova herself is a personal reflection on her own subjectivity within individual routines and daily activities. Self-portraiture became a popular genre in the socialist and post-socialist space as it allowed artists to explore their identities outside parameters of the ideal citizen.[256] Zora Rusinová argues that in the period

[256] Zora Rusinová, "Discourse of the Self: Self Portrait in the Milieu of Gender Visuals", in *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe,* edited by Bojana Pejić, (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 125.

following Stalin's death in 1953, artists in the former Soviet and Socialist countries experienced relative degrees of expressive freedom to explore themes outside the doctrine of Socialist Realism.[257] Self-portraiture and portraiture provided an alternative space for introspection, individual expression, and creativity, and allowed female artists to reflect on maternity, sexuality, the family, and the body.[258] Working with the genre of portraiture, Petrova engages with her identity as a female, feminist artist and individual, illustrating the relationships that develop between an individual and the material they produce regardless of the medium.

The choice to look inwards does not divorce Petrova from the context she is embroiled within, but rather functions as a response to larger physical, political, or psychological circumstances that can become suffocating. In her studies of art under communism, Claire Bishop elaborates on Rusinová's observations, arguing that "given the saturation of every day life with ideology, artists did not regard their work as political, but rather as existential and apolitical, committed to ideas of freedom and the individual imagination".[259] In many instances, artists did not make grand anti-authoritarian and political gestures in their work but responded to this context by looking for experiences that transcended the political and engaged subjective encounters and pleasures. Bishop notes that this has often proved difficult for Western art critics and historians to accept who excitedly look for dissident and resistant acts against totalitarianism in works created behind the Iron Curtain.[260] Although Petrova asserts her feminist politics in her interviews and is socially engaged in her work, the choice to embroider a self-portrait and

[257] Rusinová, "Discourse of the Self", 125.
[258] Rusinová, "Discourse of the Self", 125.
[259] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: participatory art and the politics of spectatorship,* (London: Verso, 2012), 129.
[260] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 147.

destroy a self-portrait functions more closely to some artworks created under communism that turn towards individual experiences and the mundane as a response to political realities.

Self-Portrait reveals Petrova's intimate personal thoughts and experiences in the careful stitches and frayed threads, although the intricacies of these preoccupations can never be entirely known to the viewer. Rather, Petrova only reveals the anxieties of "[her] personal inner experience of invisibility and self-destruction" mentioned in the artist's statement for the piece in the action of destroying a representation of herself that lacked semblance to the artist.[261] Petrova physically makes a representation of herself invisible, but this representation simultaneously anonymized her. The dynamic of production and destruction highlight the relationship between the collective and the individual that Rusinová and Bishop, among many others, have described in art under communism. The embroidered self-portrait ironically depicted a generalized human face—an androgynous citizen who becomes invisible in the crowd. Petrova intervenes in the oxymoron of invisible visibility by destroying this figure with gestures and a body that are singular and subjective, replacing the self-portrait with herself.

The act of destruction is central to the work and simultaneously reveals as it physically obscures. In her studies of destruction art, Kristine Stiles accounts how many artists in the Cold War period utilized destruction to reveal aspects of social, political, and economic realities that often lay shrouded from sight. This tendency of destruction art is exemplified by Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece* (1965). Ono sat silently and still with a pair of scissors as members of the audience cut away her clothing. Stiles argues that in works such as *Cut Piece* "artists found a material process by which to deconstruct the sensuality of objective forms and strip away the

[261] Valentyna Petrova, "Self-Portrait". *Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, exhibition catalog, (Kyiv, 2017), 13.

seductive amnesia and traumatic forgetting embodied in formal aesthetics to confront the psychological and social necessities of contemporary life".[262] Artists questioned the nature and function of the art object as something that covers, and glosses over reality, utilizing destruction to recall dynamics that lay under the social fabric. Within both *Cut Piece* and *Self-Portrait,* the action of cutting bridges the division of art and life, suggesting that art is entrenched in and responsive to the social dynamics of life by revealing them through a process of tearing away.

To use the term of Tamara Zlobina in the exhibition catalog, Petrova "un/re/weav[es]" her individual identity, anxieties, troubles, and even joys into the work by destroying the artistic input that represented an anonymized representation of herself with her own hands.[263] *Self-Portrait* complicates the application of destruction as strictly a process of negating the art object and instead exemplifies the dynamic of removing in order to reveal and reorder the constituent parts.[264] The act of cutting away her artistic input from the image exemplifies Petrova's personal relationship with the work in this gesture. The act obscures the portrait she embroidered but reveals a conflicted relationship with the medium and the self. It reconfigures the work, removing certain elements in order to highlight others in a surprising relationship. Cutting away the threads composing the artwork, Petrova addresses her identity as a woman, a citizen of

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[262] Kristine Stiles, "The Story of the Destruction in Art Symposium and the 'DIAS Affect'", in *Destruction: Documents of Contemporary Art,* edited by Sven Spieker, (London: Whitechapel Gallery and the MIT Press, 2017), 117.

[263] Zlobina uses the term as "Not ripping, but un/re/weaving, not discarding, but piercing, taking possession of and reusing".
Zlobina, "Tapestry "Glory to Labour!", 106.

[264] The dynamic of removing and revealing was exemplified in art practises of the twentieth century beginning with DADA. In his history of DADA, Jed Rasula writes that "at the heart of DADA negation is that saying no is still saying s*omething*…[this] captures the Dada strategy of giving and revoking in a single gesture".
Jed Rasula, *Destruction was my Beatrice: Dada and the unmaking of the twentieth century*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015), xi.

Ukraine, an artist, and with political agency through movements with materials that can never be replicated.

Focusing on individual experiences, pleasures, and fears within an artwork similarly functions as a navigational tool in the contemporary Ukrainian context. Jessica Zychowicz has characterized post-Soviet Ukraine as a space where officials have continuously attempted to distance Ukraine from its Soviet past; however, their tactics resemble those used by the Soviet regime.[265] She discusses the decommunization measures put in place in 2015 by President Petro Poroshenko, the first president elected following the Revolution of Dignity, such as a ban on symbols representing totalitarian regimes regardless of the context they are employed within.[266] Government authorities continued to employ grand narratives that erase individual experience and construct an official discourse of the citizen by censoring those who contradict their vision of ideal Ukraine. She posits that artists have responded to these restrictions as:

> The task set forward is more than art. The critique is aimed at the spectre of the communist past in its worst form: the grand narratives entrenched in Ukraine today that delegitimize individual experience, fail to hold institutions accountable, to respond to anger at promised reforms, and serve to justify a war in which it is not clear to civilians whom is fighting whom.[267]

The distance between the communist past and post-communist present is not as "post" as the term suggests; power has merely shifted from one regime to another with a different ideological foundation but the same tools. Exploring her subjectivity within *Self-Portrait*, Petrova turns the attention towards everyday citizens such as herself who shape their own relationships both with the past and the present in diverse ways. Her artwork contributes to a discourse of disparate voices who may even contradict one another while weaving a complex social fabric.

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[265] Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women: Feminism, Art, and Revolution in Twenty First Century Ukraine*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 336.
[266] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women*, 336.
[267] Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women,* 336.

Self-Portrait continues the tradition of embroidery as a medium for resistance and catharsis, extending the process of embroidery beyond the seams of the tapestry. Petrova physically inserts herself into the embroidered object with both her portrait and by appearing alongside her portrait, modifying it with her hands. She considers the potential of the medium beyond the physical object produced, giving meaning to the gesture of working with textile as a meditative practise—a space to think, create, and explore. The act of embroidering and (un)making function to transform turbulent economic, political, and psychological conditions in small ways that signify the labour of resilience through production and destruction as an interconnected process.

Labouring to Embroider and Rip Apart Collaboratively

In the evenings over the duration of the *TEXTUS* exhibition, Petrova visited the Visual Culture Research Centre to begin the routine performance of snipping away the threads composing her self-portrait. Day by day, the tapestry began to transform under Petrova's fingers during this intimate and thoughtful exercise. The figure became fragmented and incoherent as the threads once composing the portrait accumulated into a greater mass on the floor than on the fabric, spilling out past the seams of the yellow background. Petrova's entire body engaged in the tasks of reaching, bending, gripping, pulling, and releasing to cut away the individual embroidery threads, repeating these movements every time she visited the gallery. She continued these

performances until all that remained was the yellow fabric swaying in the gallery above a heap of colourful threads.[268] At this point, the work was complete.

Valentyna Petrova, *Self-Portrait,* 2017, still, video available at the following link: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154220600556898. Used with permission from the artist and Visual Culture Research Center.

The repetitive rituals composing *Self-Portrait* reveal a cyclical quality in the labour required to both produce and reconfigure the tapestry with destructive techniques. Before beginning to embroider the tapestry, Petrova gathered the materials necessary to produce the work—second-hand fabric and thread. She then began embroidering the tapestry, only working on it in the evenings after returning home from work and on weekends. The process of destruction performed by Petrova within the gallery reverses this ritual she sustained to produce

[268] A short 30 second clip of Petrova cutting away the threads composing the tapestry was filmed and posted to the Visual Culture Research Center Facebook page.
Visual Culture Research Center, "Учасниця виставки «TEXTUS. Вишивка. Текстиль. Фемінізм» Валентина Петрова знищує свій автопортет, відтворюючи персональний досвід, пов'язаний із невидимістю і самознищенням" [A participant in the exhibition "TEXTUS. Embroidery, Textile, Feminism" Valentyna Petrova destroys her self portrait, recreating her personal experience with invisibility and self-destruction], March 19, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154220600556898.

the tapestry in the first place.[269] Once she had methodically undone her embroidered portrait, all that remained of the work were those constituent parts except now baring the trace of her performance: the yellow fabric perforated by the needle passing through, the pieces of multi-coloured thread cut into several short segments, and Petrova's body. However, within the gallery, only the second stage of the cycle when Petrova destroys the tapestry is given form. The first stage of the cycle is implicated by the gestures of Petrova's body as it labours repetitively to destroy the embroidery and reveal the constituent parts. At this point, the cycle could potentially begin again if Petrova chose to put the fabric and thread to use once more in any number of activities.

The cyclical quality of *Self-Portrait* implicates a prior cycle of production and transformation created through the interplay of materials with a body who shapes them. Before the materials were acquired by Petrova, they were woven and spun from a series of fibres, worked into their saleable form by the hands of other labourers. These cycles could continue back all the way to the individual who planted the seeds used to produce the cloth and dyes. The fabric and thread are partial to their own history; one that Petrova continues to shape as she works with the materials in the tapestry.

Petrova implicates other labouring bodies within her work by choosing a method of destruction that allows the materials composing the work to retain their form. The process of cutting away the embroidery thread to negate her own work transforms the materials but leaves them open to another function. Simultaneously, she undoes the labour she imparted in the work completely by destroying the art object she produced. This gesture acknowledges the role other

[269] Petrova, "*Self-Portrait",* 24.

labourers have played in the lifecycle of the materials by choosing only to cut away her own artistic output. The fabric and thread have not been created by her and therefore, are not hers to destroy. The decision not to destroy these materials functions to recognize the anonymous labourers who worked to produce the fabric and threads as collaborators—fellow workers and textile producers whose labour is crucial to the composition of the work.

3.3 Valentyna Petrova, *Self-Portrait,* 2017, Tapestry and Performance. Used with permission from the artist.

The gesture of solidarity with labourers whose work is often unrecognized and undervalued has been the foundation of several feminist artworks both globally and in the Ukrainian context. This theme is evident the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles in the United States, the work *12 Hour Work Day* by the sewing collective Shvemy exhibited within *TEXTUS,* and the post campaign *I am a Ukrainian Woman* co-curated by Oksana Briukhovetska, Valentyna Petrova, and several other artists from the VCRC. Ukeles is noted for the Maintenance Art activities she began working on in 1970s New York. As part of Maintenance Art, Ukeles wrote a letter to workers at the Department of Sanitation reading "I am a maintenance artist…I use my "artistic freedom" to call "maintenance"—the work that you do, and the work that I do—"art"…Pick one hour each day…and think during that one hour that your same regular work is Art".[270] Declaring the work of city labourers art, Ukeles sought to bring attention to the unseen and unrecognized labour that sustains and builds our worlds while elevating the worth of this labour both in the minds of the workers and the public.[271] In *12 Hour Work Day,* the members of *Shvemy* sat on the street from noon to midnight sewing fanny packs embroidered with the words "Made in Slavery".[272] They mimicked the working conditions of a textile factory, only taking a fifteen minute lunch break, three bathroom breaks, and exclusively discussing work the entire time. Once the fanny packs were finished, they sold them for 44 rubles.[273] Similar to *Self-Portrait,* this action works to visualize the labour required to produce certain textile items and (de)contextualizes mass produced textile goods from their place on store shelves and in our homes. The poster campaign *I am a Ukrainian Woman* consisted of several large portraits of

[270] Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 46.
[271] Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal,* 46-47.
[272] Sewing Cooperative "Svemy", "12-Hour Work-Day"*, Textus: Embroidery, Textile, Feminism,* edited by Kateryna Mishchenko, exhibition catalog, (Kyiv, 2017), 9.
[273] Sewing Cooperative "Svemy", "12 Hour Word Day", 9.

female migrant labourers painted on an enlarged image of the Ukrainian bill for 200 *hryvni*. The posters were exhibited around the streets of Warsaw, Poland recalling advertisements.[274] They drew attention to the large number of Ukrainian women working as migrant workers in Poland and forged solidarity between artists and labourers through the image of Lesia Ukrainka—a Ukrainian poet who wrote about similar themes—whose portrait is printed on the 200 *hryvnia*.[275]

These artworks highlight relationships that can be formed between disparate groups based on looking for solidarity in the act of labouring. It is possible to break down the separation between various forms of production by understanding and recognizing the factors that have upheld this hierarchy such as economics, class, and the gendered division of labour. When the artificiality of these divisions is realized by interrogating the economic and political structures that benefit from the subjugation of labouring bodies, new relationships across difference can be built. However, these relationships simultaneously must acknowledge that differences will persist but can be productive sites of exchange and dialogue. *Self-Portrait* reveals the lineage of bodies that have worked to produce the items Petrova interacts with in the work and the lineage of women who have turned to textile as a form of survival. She builds solidarity with these labourers by leaving the materials they produced intact, but also problematizes the economic conditions that anonymize these very workers and alienate them from the objects they produced.

Petrova demonstrates her refusal to embroider and produce an art object for an economic function by tearing away the threads composing the tapestry. Simultaneously, she does not degrade these women for choosing or being forced to work in textile production for economic survival by leaving the products their hands produced intact. Producing textiles, sewing,

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[274] Oksana Briukhovetska, ""I am Ukrainian": a poster campaign that calls for reflection on that status of women-workers", *UkrainianPravda.com*, October 28, 2018, https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2018/10/28/233858/.
[275] I wrote about the poster campaign in my previous research that informed this thesis.

embroidering, and selling garments and other textile products are occupations frequently dominated by women. The line between pleasure and necessity is often blurred for these women who may work as seamstresses or embroider blouses for sale in markets because they know how to sew, not because they want to sew. Petrova's decision to destroy her embroidered product criticizes the conditions that have forced women into unsatisfactory and ungratifying forms of manual labour by refusing to engage with the dynamics of the capitalist system. She does not create an object to be sold onto the art-market, nor does she sell the performance-based component of the work as a re-creatable event. The work stands as a singular, durational event that connects the individual to a lineage of making as navigation. In this instance, the process of (un)making is a gesture of resistance and defiance to alienating forms of labour and unsustainable economic conditions.

Petrova's gesture of respect and collaboration towards the anonymous textile workers who produced the materials she used to execute *Self-Portrait* suggests an important dimension of a conscious and critical feminist ethic. Petrova engages feminism to build solidarity across textile producers as makers and questions the structures that have valued some forms of labour over others. Extending the act of artistic production to those engaged in various forms of labour and maintenance functions as a feminist statement recognizing the interconnected webs of relation that make up our society and a consideration to extend the definition of feminism. Beth Ann Pentney articulates this sentiment, arguing that it is important when studying textile production not to focus merely on examples where textile is engaged with politically or subversively. She argues that

> while many women and men can incorporate knitting into their daily lives as a form of community building, as a reclamation and celebration of feminized craft, or as a political tool,

the constraints faced by others who cannot afford this opportunity, who produce handknit items as a means of economic survival or for the sheer pleasure of it, must not be overlooked.[276] Pentney posits that although there are several examples where individuals engage with the social and political implications of textile mediums, textile production also exists as means of income for some and as leisure and hobby for others. *Self-Portrait* addresses the complexity of the medium and its symbolic, political, and economic functions for various individuals. Petrova sits in the tension present in the work between artistic expression, subversive political statements, and financial and emotional survival. She asserts that this place where the thread pulls the fabric a little bit too hard makes the tapestry all the richer.

Self-Portrait demonstrates materially, through performance, and the formal components of the work that building solidarities across difference is central to a feminist ethic in Ukraine. In her interview with Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, Petrova notes that feminism is about equality for everyone and is part of a larger imperative to build ethical and intersectional relationships across difference such as race, class, orientation, or gender.[277] This sentiment was similarly expressed by Zychowicz following her in depth studies of art in Ukraine. Zychowicz argues that "feminism has functioned in Ukraine as an all-encompassing rallying point for various issues that are more about human rights than specifically gender rights such as access to hot water and basic transport".[278] *Self-Portait* demonstrates this tendency of incorporating a feminist critique within larger human rights discourses by utilizing embroidery—a medium frequently associated with female artistic production—to address labour and navigation of challenging political, economic, and psychological conditions. She employs feminism as a critical tool: a point from which to whirl about, creating new interactions, and "textiling" the world into embodied,

[276] Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting", np.
[277] Briukhovetska and Kulchynska, *The Right to Truth*, 22.
[278] Jessica Zychowicz, *Superfluous Women*, 26.

material forms that reveal at the same time as they elude. Feminism is a launching point and an action to see solidarity in similarities but remaining mindful that individuals respond to contexts that are unique from one another subjectively.

Engaging with textile production, Petrova references the feminine, resistant, and economic tradition of embroidery but altered this tradition by incorporating destruction to subvert the contexts that relegated women to homogenous collective identities. This action of continuing a tradition with innovative stitches has the potential to build if continued over time, becoming part of a social fabric composed of individual stories that coalesce and contradict one another, enriching the tapestry as a whole. As stated by Tamara Zlobina in the *TEXTUS* catalog, "if you recreate a norm, only somewhat differently, mix up accents, bring in new meanings, in the long-run the multitude of small and subtle changes create a fundamental transformation, it changes the norm as such and blurs its boundaries".[279] By producing textiles with new materials, from different perspectives, making visible the power structures that make up the threads, and destroying the tapestry all together, Petrova has built on the tradition of embroidery and proposes that the medium can function in a myriad of interwoven, contradictory, and intertwined ways simultaneously.

Self-Portrait addresses the unseen labour of the textile workers who produced the yellow sheet and thread used in the performance, the women selling their embroidery at the market, and the artists whose works are exhibited and sold both in Ukraine and internationally. It builds solidarities with those who work to create textiles out of pleasure, necessity, or the interrelation of both suggesting that "It matters whose hands hold the needles and under what

[279] Zlobina, "Tapestry "Glory to Labour!"", 106.

circumstances."[280] In the case of all the hands that created *Self-Portrait,* the act of embroidery provided a way for them to navigate a financially precarious situation, explore individual anxieties, or find enjoyment in the action of moving the needle through fabric. Those hands have related to the medium in subjective ways, weaving in their dreams, pain, resentment, and pleasure into the individual stitches.

[280] Bryan-Wilson, *Fray,* 35.

Conclusion

I noticed the leaves beginning to turn yellow and a crispness in the air as I walked through the Botanical Park after conducting an interview with Oksana Briukhovetska on one of my last days in Kyiv. I had become familiar with this area of Kyiv after spending several weeks in Ukraine and enjoyed witnessing the routines of those who called this area their home. The late afternoon sun was illuminating the streets as I passed the workers repainting Taras Shevchenko National University packing up for the day and people began wandering into the park to leisurely walk their dogs. As I exited the Botanical Park and headed towards Taras Shevchenko Park, I spotted one of my favorite sights: men of all ages descending on the park to play a round of chess or checkers through the evening. Despite the social, economic, and political challenges that make life difficult for various segments of Ukrainian society, much like any other place, people must continue with their lives seeking pleasure in everyday activities. What might be their stories?

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I had navigated the winding avenues and hidden courtyards of Kyiv and L'viv to find the feminist voices residing amongst the monuments, churches, and cobblestone streets. What I found were friendly and hospitable individuals, both through my interviews and by chance, who were excited to share their experiences and demonstrated their deep care for the well being of others. Behind the shots of Maria Kulikovska's rifle, expressive brush strokes of Dana Kavelina's hand, and the purposeful cutting away of threads by Valentyna Petrova's body lay a commitment to create a better future for those living in Ukraine. Their purposeful, critical, and at times violent gestures aim at authoritative structures such as corrupt governments, the military, and far-right groups who contribute to mentalities and actions of intolerance. These artists

expose, shatter, and pierce the context of destruction permeating in Ukrainian society, meanwhile demonstrating how the pieces can be refashioned in surprising ways.

Kulikovska's, Kavelina's, and Petrova's artworks constitute sites of resistance and navigation as they reconceptualize the power of destruction towards their own diverse ends. For Kulikovska and Kavelina, the physical destruction of their artwork by ideological opponents fueled the artworks analyzed within this thesis. Their artistic responses demonstrate the unsustainability of militarism, nationalism, and narrow definitions of citizenship, and propose that citizens have the power to reshape these contexts in equitable and ethical ways. In contrast, Petrova criticizes the effects of an unstable economy, channeling destruction against the art object. Her performance-based engagement with destruction denies the artwork a commodified function while revealing solidarities embedded in the work. Their artworks combine the subjectivity of the artist with a concern for the representation and censorship of the naked female body, sexuality, and female labour. Simultaneously, demonstrating a concern for greater human rights issues such as the lives of those living in conflict zones, and labour rights.

Contemporary art in Ukraine engages feminism as a tool and worldview that lingers in the productive space between polarized positions in order to break them down. The three works analyzed within this thesis demonstrate this tendency through the interplay of destruction and creation as an artistic practise, combining content and form. When Kulikovska fatally shoots the sculptures of her body that she created, Kavelina depicts a woman dying under the pressure of nationalism and militarism, and Petrova takes a pair of scissors to a tapestry she embroidered, they destroy and create simultaneously. Destruction becomes a strategy that fractures and erodes, wearing down the materials to refashion them in surprising possibilities. By extension, problematizing polarities such as "us" versus "them", Soviet and post-Soviet, East and West and

revealing the complex space where the terms collapse into one another and the multi-faceted reality is revealed.

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When I met with Oksana Briukhovetska over a cup of tea in the cozy walls of Café Yaroslavna, she handed me a postcard featuring a painted portrait of a man. This postcard could serve as a starting point for future research projects. Surrounding the man are three items: an aloe vera plant, a Soviet military service card, and a plate of *perizhky* (stuffed buns). The image was part of a series she painted entitled *Uncle Tolia* (2016) for the Polish exhibit *Do or Die* (Czyń lub Giń). Briukhovetska met the protagonist for the series, a veteran from the war, on a train and based the paintings on the stories he shared with her.[281] Artworks such as *Uncle Tolia* highlight how artists and art institutions have come to play an important role engaging in human rights discourses and activism. In several instances, this is achieved by drawing on the stories of everyday people to both enhance the resonance of personal experience and appeal to a wider audience who may see themselves depicted in the artworks. These artworks contribute to highlighting multiple and partial accounts of contemporary reality in Ukraine, increasing the visibility of perspectives that easily become overshadowed.

Exploring how these projects such as *Uncle Tolia* both forge solidarities across difference and bring individual accounts into the forefront would be a valuable line of future inquiry. How are artists building relationships with individuals in other occupations, the elderly, or the disabled when they feature them in artworks? How can this function as a collaborative and radical form of artmaking? The example of *Uncle Tolia* also highlights the importance of turning

[281] Interview with Oksana Briukhovetska by Kalyna Somchynsky. September 6, 2019. Kyiv, Ukraine.

a feminist line of inquiry onto patriarchy, the construction of masculinities, and how certain institutions uphold definitions and expectations of masculinity in Ukrainian society. What are the effects of these expectations on everyday men? Unlike Oksana Briukhovetska, I do not know Uncle Tolia's full story other than his brief quote noted on the postcard: "I still had my old Soviet military service card. When I got the draft notice, I decided to say I lost it. They told me «Go smoke for 20 minutes». I came back and they had found everything about me on the computer". I do not think Uncle Tolia wanted to serve in the military for a second time.

At the same time that artists in Ukraine are featuring the stories of everyday individuals in their work and their own subjective encounters, how can I turn my attention to my Ukrainian-Canadian community here in Canada? What are the experiences of Ukrainian women who immigrated to Canada in the various waves of immigration across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? How do they navigate experiences of education, puberty, marriage, work, and raising a family, or choosing not to marry or start a family as immigrants? Where have they found sites of resistance and empowerment? Through out my research I have continually sat with a phrase my Babusia uttered in one of our conversations: "ми стійни малювали з пирогами" (we painted the walls with perohy). Women came together to make perohy, often in addition to their paid jobs, to generate sales and income for the church. Can this be a site of feminist re-imagining? Before going to Ukraine and conducting my interviews, I may have said no. Now, I may say yes.

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