

# Feminist Art in Russia in 2014-15: The Problem of the “Turn to the Right”

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Political feminist art in Russia is still very young. The prospect of strong institutions or communities forming around such art remains a distant one. Little time has passed since the first public discussions in 2011–2012 when we held talks on whether there was any need for Russian feminism, and on whether gender could even be said to have existed in the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Although some Russian artists called themselves feminists in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, during this period they mostly preferred to avoid making clear political statements on women’s rights. The only forms of discourse on gender issues that were broadly adopted in the Russian art world during this period were those involving essentialist reflection on the notion of a “feminine mystique” in women’s art. This view of women’s art as a manifestation of the realm of the feminine was finally reflected in the large exhibition *Žen d’Art: the Gender History of Art in the Post-Soviet Space* held in Moscow in 2010. *Žen d’Art* (the name can be also read in Russian as “**zhenskoe**”—feminine) was the embodiment of an idea conceived by the artist Natal’ia Kamenetskaia, one of the first feminist artists of the late Soviet period. In the 1980s Kamenetskaia started to collect materials and works for a “Museum of Women in the Arts” and created several art projects on post-Soviet women’s art history.

## The Ž struggle

The main idea animating *Žen d’Art* was the need for an attempt to take Russian museums to a new level of social reflection. We might

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<sup>1</sup> Ketī Chukhrov, “Byl li gender v SSSR?,” *Gendernye issledovaniia*, no. 20–21 (2010).