

“I’m a Feminist, Therefore...:” The Art of Gender and Sexual Dissent in 2010s Ukraine and Russia

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***Abstract:** The paper explores gender and sexual dissent in contemporary Ukraine and Russia, turning to the space between feminist art and activism. It focuses on three feminist art projects, Zhinochyi Tsekh (Women’s Work Unit, Kyiv, 2012), Feministskii Karandash (Feminist Pencil, Moscow, 2012) and Feministskii Karandash-II (Feminist Pencil-II, Moscow, 2013). It is argued that these events mark a shift in contemporary art, where feminist artists and activists engaged in projects that explicitly dissented against patriarchal societal norms and the neo-traditionalist turn in the state politics of both countries. The paper examines curatorial strategies, the artworks produced and the broader networks of dissent that influenced (and were influenced by) the art projects themselves.*

In her recent essay on mimesis and masquerade as guerrilla strategies by Ukrainian women artists, art critic Tamara Zlobina comments on the effect that societal pressure has nowadays on Ukrainian women:

often finding themselves in unsatisfactory marriages, filled with the prospect of emotional, economic, and even physical and sexual violence, many women finally turned away from their former “I’m not a feminist, but...” position themselves to declare instead: “I’m a feminist, therefore...” and are now going through separation or divorce proceedings.¹

1 T. Zlobina, “Masquerading as Womanliness: Female Subjectivity in Ukrainian Contemporary Art,” in *New Imaginaries: Youthful Reinvention of Ukraine’s*