

David Chichkan's exhibition dedicated to warring anarchists was canceled in Odessa under pressure from the ultra-rightists

Autonomous Action

January 23rd, 2024

Recently it became known about the cancelation of the exhibition of anarchist artist David Chichkan at the Odessa National Art Museum.

Since February 24, 2022, David has been actively supporting anti-authoritarians fighting against Russian aggression. He writes that his exhibition *With Ribbons and Flags (2022-2023)*, which was held in Uzhgorod, Zaporizhzhya and Krivoy Rog and canceled in Odessa, is intended to highlight the diversity of political views of people as well as social groups that make up Ukraine's defense forces

The project is a series of graphic images (pictured) of members and participants of anarchist and anti-authoritarian socialist groups defending Ukraine with weapons in their hands or who have already died in this war. Another hero depicted by the artist in the group portrait is Nestor Makhno, who still inspires anarchists in Ukraine and around the world to fight against imperialism. The black color of the flags and ribbons refers to anarchism, purple - to feminism, red - to anti-authoritarian socialism. The waves of ribbons flowing from one work to the next link this series to Chichkan's previous project *Ribbons and Triangles*, which was presented in February 2022 in an exhibition at the Lviv Art Center interrupted by the Russian invasion.

"The Resistance Committee", representing anti-authoritarians fighting on the side of Ukraine, writes that the far-right, in order to manipulate public opinion, claims: allegedly in his earlier works David Chichkan supported pro-Russian separatism. The nationalists also threatened to set fire to the gallery. According to the "Resistance Committee", some of David's older works can indeed be interpreted ambiguously from today's point of view, but anti-authoritarian fighters against the Russian regime support the artist and strongly state that the accusations of a pro-Russian stance are a figment of the nationalists' violent fantasies.

The Solidarity Collectives, which help the anti-authoritarian fighters, also support and urge support for David, considering the cancelation of his exhibition an act of censorship. They consider David to be one of the few Ukrainian artists who openly calls himself an anarchist and organically links anarchism with Ukrainian identity in his work. His works constantly address the struggle for an equal, free and tolerant society and criticize totalitarian ideologies and sym-

bols. Canceling the exhibition under pressure from far-right populists is an attack not only on David, but also on the entire anti-authoritarian community, which includes volunteers and fighters defending Ukraine.

The cancellation of David Chichkan's exhibition also angered Dmytro Petrov's comrades from the Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists. Dmitry, who died near Bakhmut in April 2022, is one of the fighters depicted in David's paintings.

According to the BoAC¹, in some of the pictures painted by Chichkan shortly after the 2014 Maidan uprising, anarchists "are represented as a third force opposing both the Russian empire and the nationalists and militarists among its opponents. In the context of those events, such a message of the artist does not seem erroneous. First, from an anarchist perspective, the attempt to deepen the anti-capitalist, anti-state, anti-sexist tendencies in the popular movement in 2014 may indeed have seemed (and indeed was) a higher priority than opposing the Russian invasion that had begun. Second, (and Dmitry Petrov has written about this), the nation is itself an imagined community, a bloody product of modernism, along with the mechanized, structured genocide of the "wrong" ethnic groups - a constant attribute of the nation-state era.

The disruption of David Chichkan's exhibition by the far-right is not just an act of censorship; it is an aggressive attempt to impose a narrative about what Ukrainian resistance to Putin's empire is and is not. Is it a new world based on the ideas of solidarity, freedom, equality, mutual aid, self-governance, or is it another hierarchical nation-state fighting against an imperialist state, supported by Western "democracies" that are increasingly slipping into authoritarianism, nationalism, state militarism, and the omnipresent control of intelligence agencies. The triumph of the doctrine of the ultra-right will inevitably lead to dire consequences for Ukrainian society."

¹ Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists (BOAK)

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Machine translated using DeepL, added footnote for abbreviation.

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