

[Politics](#) [Neighbours](#) [Economics](#) [Society](#) [History](#) [Opinions](#) [Archive](#) [Photo Gallery](#)2 April, 2014 · [Bohdan Butkevych](#)

Pavlo Gudimov: “A different vision is not a pretext to resort to Russian-like hysteria and absurd politicization of culture”

Renowned gallery-owner and musician talks about on ways to prevent people turning into titushkas, consolidation of artists and futility of fascist methods in culture.



Pavlo Gudimov is well known in Ukraine. He is one of the founders of the original Okean Elzy. Years after leaving the band, he played with the original group on the Maidan in December. The video of the song called Druh – Friend in English – performed by Okean Elzy as thousands of Ukrainians turned on the lights on their phones on one of the revolution’s cold nights has gone viral on YouTube. Today, Pavlo is an innovative gallery owner and art curator. His Ya Gallery has been a symbol of independent contemporary art over the ten years of its existence. In his interview for **The Ukrainian Week**, Pavlo looks at the role that culture should play in the turbulent times Ukraine has been going through.

U.W: How should artists react to what is literally wartime today? Should they be the warriors on an ideological front, as is the case in Russia, or conversely, continue to remind people of wonderful

Related by subject

- [The Economist: Signs of aesthetic rebellion appear in the Ukrainian culture](#)

Last publications

[згорнути](#)

- [Fear to say “Yes”](#)
Democraten-66 MPs about the upcoming referendum on EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and their Yes campaign in the Netherlands
29 February, Anna Korbut
- [Breaking out of hollow rhetoric](#)
What makes Ukrainians vulnerable to populism
26 February, Oleksandr Kramar
- [Thoughts on the future](#)
Experts on how they see

things?

– Right now, we see artists and people involved in culture, on both sides of the border, energetically expressing their positions regarding on-going events, as never before. Very often, this leads to deep indignation, particularly when some letters supporting a specific politician, moreover Putin, rather than the people's movement, are signed by people such as Yuri Bashmet (well-known musician, whose family comes from Lviv, who signed a statement in support of the Russian President – **Ed.**). Others do the opposite, closing themselves off and creating a cocoon around themselves, because they don't want to see or hear anything, as if saying that the environment prevents them from concentrating on their creativity. Having said this, when you close yourself off, you are incapable of creating anything. In general, artists cannot but react to what is happening around, because they cannot be in touch and not have a sense of their own country. After all, people involved in culture are, to a certain extent, regarded as litmus paper. Unfortunately, politicians remain the main stars of the mainstream, while artists have to play a far more important role in the social life of the country.

U.W: But in recent years, art has been squeezed out by a low-quality pop substitute, which was actively supported by the authorities of that time. Will the artistic environment be able to cope with such a mission now?

– It's true, that in the last four years, culture, even by Ukrainian standards, has been actively moved to the underground: the authorities and pro-government oligarchs did everything to make it impossible for artists to communicate with the people. This was done for purely mercantile reasons. The revolution can change this: it is the Maidan that has become a very substantial and important platform for communication, which finally allowed artists to speak directly to consumers, not filtered through the mass media. In the future, this should protect us and our society from "thugification". Fighters for hire reflect the lack of culture that has been planted over many years. In that cultureless environment, UAH 200 is good enough to replace ethics and honour while an artist is seen as a solitary freak who has no influence on the developments whatsoever.

U.W: Has the Maidan changed the Ukrainian cultural environment?

– Most of the people involved in culture were at the Maidan. Moreover, at the most dramatic moments, their activity only increased. However, overall, artists were clearly shocked by all these events. Many are still struggling to make their way out of that breakdown, because artists live with exposed nerves, they are unprotected in the face of such things. Let's not forget that culture is basically pacifist by nature. So it is very interesting that on the contrary, the clashes on Hrushevskoho Street or the toppling of the Lenin statue - very provocative from the very start and directed towards a split, both in society as a whole, and in the cultural environment into "normal people" and "radicals" - have resulted in tighter grouping and consolidation. And this consolidation only strengthened and continues to strengthen. So this is clearly a positive influence of the Maidan.

READ ALSO: [Yulia Lytvynets: "Museums must be open. And to be](#)

Europe coming out of the current crises

16 February, Anna Korbut

■ [Once and For All](#)

After the hybrid war, time to deal with the hybrid independence

5 February, Julia Oliynyk

■ [Illusion of a Federation](#)

Russia broke up in 1917, but the Bolsheviks intended to restore the empire – as a springboard to create a "Global Soviet Republic"

5 February, Stanislav Kulchytsky

■ [Leaving the Worst Behind](#)

Ukraine's economy will start moving upwards and gain momentum gradually

5 February, Lyubomyr Shavalyuk

U.W: Do you think that Ukrainian culture finally has a chance to replace the low-quality Russian commercial rubbish stuffed into the minds of most Ukrainians by Russian and local TV and radio? In view of the openly anti-Ukrainian position of many artists in Russia, is it worth removing them from Ukraine’s cultural territory, using administrative measures?

– This is what I say: real culture does not have any rubbish, not even the Russian one with its aggressive nature. I wonder what pushed Yuri Bashmet, who is a musical genius, to sign this infamous letter (**see Russia’s Tango with the Devil on p. 29**). I assume that most of the signatures there may have been collected by relevant bodies and they said it was for a different purpose. They may have said it was to support Russians in Crimea or express support for their compatriots if they are truly threatened by something. It is true that many people don’t understand me, but even Bashmet and Lungin (a well-known film director and another signee of the letter – **Ed.**) and Tabakov should be interviewed. I still believe that many of these people were not completely aware of the situation. Let’s not wave our swords when talking about geniuses: saying that if someone has signed such a document, we immediately reject this person forever, no concert tours or exhibitions will be allowed, and he has to leave Ukraine. Even if it emerges that they truly support Putin’s actions, we should not respond in kind. We should not ban artists simply for their views, particularly if they are sincere. They may have a different vision, but this is not a pretext to resort to Russian-like hysteria and an absurd level of the politicization of culture, such as banning Okean Elzy from performing in Russia. Of course, if Russian artists try to engage in some kind of propaganda, that’s a different matter, but we cannot ban them as artists. Moreover, it’s not worth throwing rotten tomatoes at them during their performances, because any acts of violence will certainly be used against Ukraine. The only thing that can be said, is that our state institutions should be free of any influence and they should improve the quality and selection of the cultural product presented. What should be rejected is the low-quality Russian television product with its subliminal message broadcasting specific cultural codes.

U.W: But we have a war, and these people are supporting the enemy. How can one take this indifferently?

– Under no account should culture be transformed into an instrument for politicization of society, and this must be set forth in all possible codes and laws. It is because of the falsehood and insincerity that the gentle Ukrainianisation campaign failed earlier. The key law here is the artist’s right to free expression. However much we would like quick and radical resolutions, we still have to go to Russians to talk to them, just the same as we have to talk to quite a few Ukrainians, who unfortunately, also have views that are different from our own. If we want to build a new, truly democratic country, we must not use fascist methods, which are the only ones found in Russia’s arsenal of tools. Just recall how almost three million people came to see the exhibition of what the Nazis saw as degenerative art in Munich, while barely 500,000 visited the exhibition of Nazi art (the Degeneration Art Exhibition opened in 1937 in Munich

presenting 650 works of art that did not fit into the general art framework of the Nazi party. The works were by outstanding modernists including Otto Dix, Vasily Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst and the like. At the same time, the Nazis celebrated the opening of the grand Haus der Kunst featuring what Hitler and his spin doctors saw as genuine art – **Ed.**). This will always be the case, however much current fascists or those of the past tried to make their way into culture which they don't understand. The same rule applies to relations between Ukrainian artists and the state: they must be as independent as possible from it, because an artist in service to the state apparatus – is always at least kitsch and pseudo-culture, or “common fascism” at its worst – as is currently the case in Russia. Russia's artists and its entire society will shortly be undergoing a painful and long treatment process with many depressions and disenchantments. Instead, we have to show how a political revolution transforms into a cultural one. European values are lines of those willing to get to museums. We have already lost 23 years, and we cannot transform into a mirror image of our neighbours on the wave of revolutionary euphoria. We must not lose our sense of tolerance and wisdom, which is our main advantage over the current Russian celebration. We have to unite around the battle for, as opposed to against, something, which is what our Russian neighbours do.

Related publications:

- [Traveller, Hunter and Philosopher](#)
 - [Lilly, The Hetman's Daughter](#)
 - [Calendar of events](#)
 - [The Tribal Instinct](#)
 - [19th-century Ukraine: Between Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism](#)
 - [Calendar of Events](#)
 - [Calendar of Events](#)
 - [Andriy Kurkov: “I want Ukrainian culture to incorporate everything that belongs to Ukraine”](#)
 - [Art Reconciliation](#)
 - [Calendar of Events: Twenty Shades of Youth](#)
-

 [art, culture, Pavlo Gudimov](#)

 [AddThis](#) |    

Copyright © Ukrainian Week LLC. All rights reserved.

Reprint or other commercial use of the site materials is allowed only with the editorial board permission.

[Legal disclaimer](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

[Terms of use](#)

[Contact us](#)