

Blair A. Ruble

# **THE ARTS OF WAR**

Ukrainian Artists Confront Russia

Year One



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## Author's Note

These essays all appeared in the Woodrow Wilson Center Kennan Institute's *Ukraine Focus* blog

(<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/collection/arts-war-ukrainian-artists-confront-russia>) over the course of the year beginning with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

The series grew from my need to respond to the horrendous events unfolding before me. Previous work relating the arts to social and political developments in Ukraine and Russia led me to turn to the work of Ukraine's artistic creators to better understand what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen.

I, like many, have been astonished by the steadfastness of Ukrainians in the defense of their country. The stories presented here highlight the ways in which they have long explored the meaning of their country and culture through the arts, and the manner in which the arts and their creators have empowered Ukrainians to confront the Russian invaders. They also offer intriguing clues about the culture, society, and politics of a postwar Ukraine.

These essays represent my attempt to provide Ukrainian artists a place where they can speak for themselves. I have been fortunate in being able to collaborate in the preparation of these articles with several of the artists mentioned here. Aside from the introductory and concluding essays, I have striven to keep my own voice in the background. I purposefully follow a variety of performance and visual artistic endeavors in a range of regional settings to capture the expanse of Ukrainian creativity. The fifty pieces here follow the course of the war's first year, with initial shock giving way to a search for comprehension, followed by a profound resistance to the invasion. By the end of the year, the tales reveal a deep reinvention of various art forms as a distinctive Ukrainian artistic voice consolidates.

The essays may be read chronologically, or by artistic genre: music, dance, theater, video, the visual arts, etc. Readers may turn first to those set in specific locations: Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, Odesa, etc. Alternatively, readers may direct their attention to the multiple

connections, financial and creative, that have emerged between Ukrainian artists and the international community. Or search out the many moments when Ukrainian civilian and military authorities have endorsed the performing arts as a means of advancing their country's fortunes. However approached, I am confident that even the most informed readers will discover a depth and creativity to the Ukrainian artistic scene that they hardly suspected existed prior to the Russian invasion.

Blair A. Ruble  
Washington, DC  
February 24, 2023