



Jessica Zychowicz. *Superfluous Women: Art, Feminism, and Revolution in Twenty-First-Century Ukraine.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Illustrations. 424 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4875-0168-6.

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Superfluous Women: Art, Feminism, and Revolution in Twenty-First-Century Ukraine explores the art and activism of Ukraine’s “interrevolutionary” generation—the generation between 2004’s Orange Revolution and 2014’s Euromaidan. Jessica Zychowicz argues that across the spectrum of artistic and political movements of that period, the focus was on the failure of the reforms promised after the 2004 mass uprising against falsified elections. Interrogating state and economic violence, these artistic and political movements reassert the human body as a site of agency and protest. Specifically, Zychowicz argues, the female body is the main mechanism of dissent: “Gender and sexuality remain in the foreground of these activists’ experimentations and their appropriations of representational schemata of past canonical works from nineteenth- and twentieth-century Slavic and Soviet literature, painting, and photography” (p. 5). The author uses “feminism” in this context as a term through which to approach debates around democracy, civil rights, economics, and violence, all central themes throughout the book. She introduces several important art projects and movements that are indicative of a unique time in Ukraine’s postindependence history. The author’s connection with the artists through interviews en-

hances the images and descriptions of works of art, manifestos, and political responses—including repressions of artists—that make up much of the book’s content.

Zychowicz’s work is marked by the breadth of its evidence and examples. The first two chapters focus on the topless protest group Femen, known globally for protesting everything from local Kyiv infrastructural problems to the sex and marriage trade in Ukraine to the treatment of women in Islam. Chapter 3 homes in on Ukrainian feminists’ photography projects; chapter 4 explores activist art projects from the years leading up to the Euromaidan mobilizations in fall 2013. The final chapter attends to the postrevolutionary cultural movements that integrate decommunizing legislation into their worldviews. Zychowicz places these in conversation with Ukrainian artistic and political movements spanning the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s; dissidents in the 1980s and 1990s; and cultural figures, including Taras Shevchenko, and pop stars, such as Ruslana and Verka Serduchka.

In her analysis of Femen, Zychowicz works with the conclusion that the group uses topless protest to parody the flailing Ukrainian state and

anxieties about capitalism. She argues that Femen's social messages are often lost because "they were dark and hard to digest as a radical counter-image of the optimism of the Orange Revolution" (p. 68). While their messages were often rather impossible to comprehend, this is certainly not the only interpretation or explanation of their activism. Indeed, there have been varied responses to and robust discussion around the group, not only in academia but also among Ukrainian feminists and activists, little of which is represented in the volume. Despite devoting two chapters to the group, Zychowicz leaves the reader wondering why she does not delve more deeply into what she calls the "broader debate among Ukrainian feminists of all stripes" around Femen and their relationship with and use of the term "feminism" (p. 30).

Zychowicz rightly details concern about Femen's topless protests and nude images being tailored more for a male gaze. In the following chapters, however, she features art that relies heavily on female nudity, by both female and male artists alike. Though some of the art presented, especially in chapter 4, succeeds in detailing the political implications of male artists in terms of their criticism of the state, it also raises the questions of how male artists engage with feminist debates and how nudity is used in art to embody those debates. Zychowicz argues that these artists are critiquing the "instrumentalization of art by the state and the privatization of nearly all markets and legal processes by local oligarchs," but she does not explain why male artists' depictions of female genitalia are effective criticisms of the state and how the artists are marginalized within the state (p. 240). Given these artists' wide range of works, many of which make a more explicit political statement without using female bodies, the reader may wish for more explanation from the author as to why these particular works of art were chosen to illustrate the arguments—and the feminist intentions—of the book.

As an anthropologist who is deeply invested in the particulars of human subject research, at times I found myself wishing for greater exposition of Zychowicz's analytical methodology. Particularly for the reader who comes from a gender studies background or the social sciences more broadly, rather than art and literary criticism, how did Zychowicz select these examples? How did she choose the comparative examples in which to contextualize these art projects? For instance, chapter 3 focuses on one photography series by Yevgenia Belorusets, titled *32 Gogol Street*. Zychowicz counterposes these images with Soviet photographer Alexander Rodchenko's images from the 1920s. The author's intention with this comparison is to show how Belorusets conveys, through her photos, "nostalgia for another's nostalgia" (p. 153); they show a disappearing generation living in a space that reflects a Soviet past being remade without including the voices of the people represented in Belorusets's photos. The reader may wonder if the connection between Rodchenko and Belorusets was Zychowicz's idea or if this was an intentional aesthetic step on the part of Belorusets. Nonetheless, Belorusets's images are touching, and the narrative of her activism to help the residents of 32 Gogol Street find safer residences is an example of the link between art and activism that the book promises in its introduction. More such narratives would have been a welcome addition to the analysis of the art projects featured in the book.

This book will be of interest to readers who seek to learn more about political artistic movements in Ukraine in the 2000s, particularly those who hope to understand the context of these movements within a wide variety of other artistic moments. The large number of images included in the text is a welcome addition and brings texture to the book's analysis. Further, the book introduces artists whose significant contributions to Ukraine's postindependence artistic culture will be of interest to anyone researching and teaching in the fields of art history and criticism.

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