# the slavic scene

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### letter from the chair



### Dear friends,

Russia's war against Ukraine continues, every day bringing death and destruction to the Ukrainian people and their country. With no end in sight, this war has already deeply affected the entire world. Among many other undoubtedly more serious consequences, it will also have a profound impact on our discipline, the ways we teach and interpret Slavic cultures, and in particular the cultures of Russia and Ukraine. In the current situation, it becomes even more imperative that our department build a strong Ukrainian program. Thanks to the efforts of our Slavic Language Program Director, Svitlana Rogovyk, we are now one of the very few Slavic departments in North America offering three years of the Ukrainian language regularly. In the Fall of 2022, we also offered two mini-courses on Ukrainian culture which attracted many students from across the University. The minicourse "Ukraine: Culture and Society through the Prism of the 2014-2022 Russia-Ukraine War" was taught by

Professor Nataliya Gorodnia, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, remotely from Germany where she was displaced and will teach again in the Winter term. Another Ukrainian scholar displaced by the war, Mariana Burak, will teach a new mini-course on the history of the Ukrainian language and its role in the formation of Ukrainian identity. These, and other Ukraine-related courses, enable us to maintain a robust minor degree program in Ukrainian Studies.

Another highlight of the Fall term was the art exhibition "I have a crisis for you": Women Artists of Ukraine Respond to War curated by our Ph.D. candidate Grace Mahoney and our alumna Dr. Jessica Zychowicz, currently the Executive Director of Fulbright Ukraine. The exhibition featured the works of female painters, photographers, filmmakers, poets, translators, and textile artists, many of whom experienced the war directly (more on this exhibition on pages 4 and 5). To bring contemporary Ukrainian cinema to U-M's campus, we initiated a Ukrainian Film Series. It included three new Ukrainian films and will continue in the Winter term. More details about this film series can be found on page 13.

To help our students better understand the complexity of Russian imperialist history and its repercussions for today's politics, our department, in collaboration with the Center for Russian and East European Studies (CREES), invited two prominent Russian scholars, currently in exile, to share their insights in the Russian Culture and Society course as remote guest lecturers. Dr. Aleksandr Dmitiriev spoke on the political and intellectual evolution of the famous Ukrainian historian and the first president of independent Ukraine Mykhailo Hrushevsky. Professor Kirill Rogov, a prominent political analyst, discussed the historical roots of Russian imperialism in connection with the war in Ukraine (more details can be found on page 10). We also hosted two international speakers with talks on different aspects of Russian cultural activity outside Russia. Ivan Tolstoi, a wellknown expert on Russian émigré culture and popular presenter at Radio Liberty, told the fascinating story of the first publication of Boris Pasternak's novel Doctor Zhivago, while Professor Muireann Maguire (University of Exeter, UK) presented her research on Nicholas Wreden, an enigmatic Russian-American editor and translator.

All our hopes for 2023 are that it will be a better year for Ukraine and the entire world.

Sincerely,

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Mikhail Krutikov Professor and Chair, Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures



# Spotlight from the Exhibition *"I have a crisis for you": Women Artists of Ukraine Respond to War*: Oksana Briukhovetska's Grief Rugs

Grace Mahoney, Ph.D. Candidate



Entryway of the Exhibition in Lane Hall

"I don't want to make works about war. I don't want war to exist" read artist Oksana Briukhovetska from a neatly printed sheet of notes at the opening reception to the exhibition "I have a crisis for you": Women Artists of Ukraine Respond to War in Lane Hall. Oksana is one of the nine artists featured in the exhibit curated by Jessica Zychowicz

(Slavic Ph.D. 2015 and Director of Fulbright Ukraine) and myself that opened in September. Featuring prints of paintings, drawings, photographs, and poetry in translation, Oksana's pieces, two "grief rugs" sewn in the style of Chilean *arpilleras*, brought vivid colors, textures, and material gravitas to the exhibition of artworks responding to the ongoing war in Ukraine. "I dedicate my works to people who are now giving their lives for Ukraine, and to people who are losing their lives for no reason in Ukraine. This is what I can do with my art—to commemorate, to create a symbolic cemetery, a symbolic memorial."

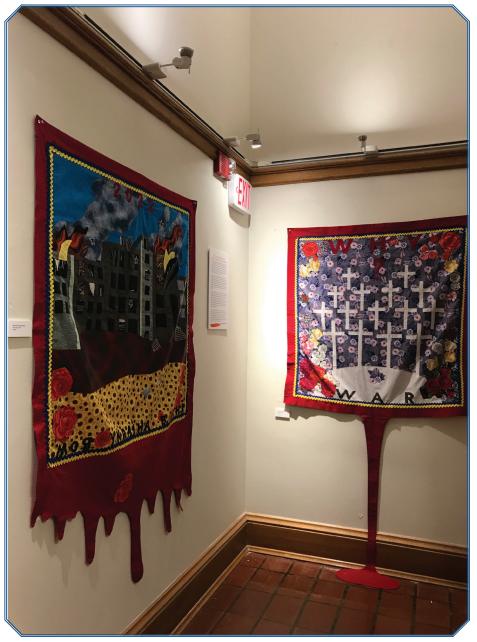
A well-known figure in the Ukrainian contemporary art scene and beyond, Oksana is currently finishing her MFA at Stamps School of Art and Design. Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Oksana's artistic project focused on the Black Lives Matter movement and comparative strains with civic activism in Ukraine. But, as she described in her speech at the opening reception, the war has compelled her to respond with her art as a tribute and form of personal relief–despite very much preferring to work on other topics.



"Evacuation" by Kinder Album, 2022



Oksana's project of grief rugs will ultimately constitute a series. The first two, those featured in the Lane Hall exhibit, present scenes from the war: the first, a cemetery of white wooden crosses with the words "Why War?" and the second, a burning building with the words "Moia Ukraina v ohnakh" ("My Ukraine is in flames")—a reference to work by Oleksandr Dovzhenko. In November, Oksana invited folks on the Ukrainian studies listserv to view her latest piece at her studio. Based on a folk song, the rug depicts a bird flying outside the window of a country house with the words "Letila zozulia cherez moiu khatu" ("A cuckoo flew through my house"). The bird, however, is wounded—a spray of blood spills over the windowsill and drips from the curtains. In Oksana's studio, the red and white rug popped out against a bright blue wall. A choral rendition of the folk song playing from her laptop floated in the air. And around the main piece hung small fabric vignettes: clusters of flowers and family photos from the early twentieth century. In almost every photo, taken on special occasions, Oksana's ancestors hold bouquets or wear flower crowns. Whereas the first two rugs reflect scenes from the current war, this rug delves into personal and national histories and juxtaposes life with death and joy with violence.



Oksana Briukhovetska's Grief Rugs

A Cuckoo Flew Through My House is currently installed with Oksana's other pieces in the Weiser Hall Gallery (5th Floor) as part of the continuing display of *"I have a crisis for you"*, which will be available for viewing through February 23. I also encourage everyone to attend Oksana's final MFA exhibition in March.





Congratulations



Ewa Malachowska-Pasek, Ladislav Matějka Collegiate Lecturer in Polish & Czech Studies at the University of Michigan in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures successfully defended her doctoral dissertation titled *From "Gypsy" to "Rom": An Analysis of Changes in Polish Discourse on Ethnic and National Minorities. A Semantic and Lexical Study* at the Polish Languages Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Krakow. Congratulations Ewa!

### A Personal Interview with Professor Jindřich Toman



# You have recently finished a new book. Can you tell us something about it?

"Gladly. It is a set of studies that map the nineteenth century Jewish culture in Bohemia. As I am not a 'regular' historian, I took the road of cultural studies—this is mainly a book that deals with literature, journalism, and issues of language, but questions of acculturation,

emancipation, and antisemitism are also addressed."

#### Has there been earlier literature on these topics?

"Yes and no. In order to approach the topic, hurdles need to be overcome—among other things, knowing Czech and German. I am not mentioning this to boast of this capacity but in order to remind us that interdisciplinarity begins, in many cases, with a linguistic 'intercapacity,' especially in the context of Central Europe. Since the Bohemian Jewish community was predominantly German-speaking in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to pay attention to this. As for the details, some chapters pick up discussions that had been known to specialists, but some go beyond the established research canon. For instance, the chapter on the communicative patterns that emerged in the revolutionary days of 1848 discusses public 'conversations' that appeared in streets in the form of handbills and similar media plastered on walls. But the chapter really opens a whole subdiscipline, much more could be said about the street as a communication platform. The chapter on Jan Neruda is also rather nontraditional in that it shows in detail that Neruda was an open antisemite. This conclusion has

already generated angry reactions, naturally so—Neruda is a classic journalist, writer, and poet of Czech literature, see any textbook. But the point is not that we find another antisemite, but that we show how antisemitism functioned in those days. In Neruda's case, the pattern is standard and therefore hard to deny. His call for the exclusion of Jews from Czech society serves the cause of Czech nationalism. Exclusion of a group member from a given group represents a mechanism that hardens the identity of the group, in this case the Czechs—someone simply needs to be excluded. That is at least what group psychology 101 tells us."

#### When is the book going to appear?

"It will be published in Prague by Karolinum, The Charles University Press, hopefully in March, under the title Bohemia's Jews and Their Nineteenth Century: Texts, Contexts, Reassessments. A Czech translation should follow soon."

#### Any research projects in planning?

"Thanks for asking! With the above project nearing completion, I can now return to my old project, namely illustrated magazines of the 1920s and 1930s. This last semester I was awarded a Josef Dobrovský Fellowship by the Academy of Sciences in the Czech Republic and spent some time in Prague, mapping the relevant material. Among other things, I am interested in remediation, i.e., the ways in which content travels across media, but some basic magazine profiles need to be provided too. Lifestyle magazines, especially *The Gentleman*, are my pets, but let's see how things qo."



#### New Mini-Course Offers a Different Take on War Trauma

Tatjana Aleksic, Associate Professor



In the upcoming year, the Slavic Department will offer a new mini-course introducing Kosovo films. The films will primarily be in the Albanian language, with a few in the Serbian language. Currently, the Kosovo film production in Albanian is arguably the most vibrant in European cinema, with many films made by new female authors. These female authors introduce radically new visions for the society emerging in a

space between war trauma and the boundaries of its own patriarchal enclosedness.

In this mini-course, students will be able to work on new films, those made between 2019-2021. Unfortunately, most of these films will likely never reach wider distribution, as commonly happens with small filmographies. Therefore, course participants will have privileged access to lesser-known, yet fascinating material that opens new ways of how they think about post-war trauma, mourning, patriarchal norms, feminist agency, or social gender, without necessarily applying western norms of thinking about these topics.

Many of the films that will be presented in this minicourse share a specific spotlight on survivors' inability to properly mourn their losses, on their economic survival and women's entrepreneurship in the face of lethal capitalist post-socialist and post-war economy. Additionally, they focus on non-heteronormative love, shame, and gender shifting in a very patriarchal social [C]ourse participants will have privileged access to lesser-known, yet fascinating material that opens new ways of how they think about post-war trauma...

environment. They adopt a specific approach that can best be defined by what some critics call "the presence of absence," underlined by a silence that is simultaneously restorative of the lifeworld lost to war trauma, as it is also a productive performance. These films are dominated by silence, manifested as much as in scarce dialogue as in the diegetic avoidance of references to the war as the underlying cause of the hardships with which their protagonists are forced to deal in its aftermath.

Among the films planned for the course are Hive by Blerta Basholli, probably the best known film from the new Kosovar production, but also lesser known ones like Zana, by Antoneta Kastrati, or Luana Bajrami's The Hill Where Lionesses Roar, or Darkling by Dušan Miličić.



Plans are in place to expand this mini-course into a semester-long course in future terms.



# Teaching the Course "Ukraine: Culture and Society through the Prism of the 2014–2022 Russia–Ukraine War" at the University of Michigan

Nataliya Gorodnia, Lecturer, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine and Slavic Department, U-M



2022 was an extremely tough year for my country, Ukraine. It was also a year of crucial decisions and choices for all countries of the world, including the United States. Thanks to the decisions of the American government and U.S. allies, my country has been able to survive. The unprecedented and comprehensive assistance

of the United States and its allies allowed Ukraine to continue its existential struggle against the aggressor. However, the resources of Ukraine and the aggressor, the state with the largest territory, huge population and energy reserves, nuclear arsenal, and a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, were too unequal. That is why, despite the heroic resistance of Ukrainians and the assistance of the United States and its allies, Ukraine was unable to liberate all the occupied territories and achieve a fundamental turning point in the war by the end of 2022. The struggle continues.

I was recently asked by European colleagues: how much do Americans know about Ukraine, and what can Ukrainians do to persuade the United States to provide them with more weapons to liberate their territory?

Firstly, I believe that most Americans know little about Ukraine. However, a full-scale World War II-style war in the heart of Europe has prompted them to know more in order to better understand the causes of the war and U.S. support for Ukraine. I have had the privilege of contributing to this understanding by teaching an interdisciplinary course "Ukraine: Culture and Society through the Prism of the 2014-2022 Russia-Ukraine War" in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan. For decades, understanding, and often misunderstanding, Ukraine was shaped by Russian narratives, with little interest in hearing the Ukrainian voice. That is why the medieval state of Rus' with its capital in Kyiv was mostly called "Kievan Russia", the Soviet Union--"Russia", and its population--"Russians", etc. There was little room in this narrative for Ukraine and Ukrainians, one of the largest ethnic groups in Europe. It has taken a devastating and bloody war to discover Ukrainians with their distinctive history and culture, as well as a long tradition of fighting for freedom. In contemporary Ukraine, we are all Ukrainians, regardless of our ethnic origins, and understanding this diversity is crucial to debunking Russian propaganda.

I am pleased that my course aroused interest among students in both Fall 2022 and Winter 2023 terms. It was my first experience teaching at the University of Michigan last autumn, and I really enjoyed it. My students were intelligent, responsible, and highly motivated young people from different backgrounds. They were united by a desire to understand the causes of the war, the sources of Ukrainian resistance, and the world in which we live.

> In contemporary Ukraine, we are all Ukrainians, regardless of our ethnic origins, and understanding this diversity is crucial to debunking Russian propaganda.

I've enjoyed that U-M and the United States put trust in me as a lecturer and the freedom to choose the forms of teaching, the possibility to focus on the course and students' progress, the comprehensive support, many opportunities for professional development, and a minimum of bureaucracy. Everything was designed to be as simple as possible, which encourages us to achieve the set goals. I have always admired the combination of freedom and the rule of law in the United States, and my experience teaching at U-M proved how great it worked.

Secondly, when answering the question of my European colleagues—what Ukrainians can do to convince the U.S. to provide them with more weapons—I emphasized how much Ukrainians appreciate the support and assistance of America. We all understand that without the support of the U.S., Ukraine would not be able to survive. At the same time, I believe that the major issue in the Russia-Ukraine war for the U.S. and other liberal democracies is not just to save Ukraine, but to stop the aggressor, a revisionist state with nuclear weapons and a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Potential aggressors are closely watching the developments. I believe that first of all this is a battle to save the rulesbased international order, established after WWII, which has been in crisis since at least 2014 when Russia annexed a part of Ukraine's territory. This is a battle for the new international order that will be formed as a result of the war, and the role of the United States and other liberal democracies in it. Thus, in this battle, we are all together, and Ukraine is just a battlefield.





#### **Professor Kirill Rogov on Russia's Imperialism**

Mikhail Krutikov, Professor



Russia's aggression against Ukraine has dramatically changed the physical and cultural landscape of Eastern Europe. It has also presented significant intellectual challenges for those of us who teach and study Russian culture. One of those challenges is a critical investigation of the roots of Russian imperialism. To help our students get a deeper perspective on this complex issue, we invited Professor Kirill Rogov to give guest lectures via zoom in our courses, Russian Literature and Empire (RUS375) and Russian Culture and Society (RUS231), which were co-sponsored by CREES. An accomplished scholar of early modern Russia, Professor Rogov is widely known as an insightful political and economic commentator and public intellectual who has long been an outspoken critic of Putin's regime. With the outbreak of the war in February 2022, he fled to Russia fearing persecution for his views. He is currently a senior fellow at the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna and the founder and director of Re: Russia Expertise, Analysis and Policy Network, an expert and discussion platform which produces updated reviews of current expertise, new data, and global discussions on the state of Russia.

In his presentation titled "Post-Imperialism: Russia's War in Ukraine," Professor Rogov traced the origins of Russian Empire back to the late 17th century when Muscovy acquired eastern parts of today's Ukraine, the area which Russia is trying to reconquest today. He argued that to better understand the historical background of the current war, we need to examine the clash between two opposite trends that run through Russian and Soviet modern history, towards westernization through social modernization on the one hand, and towards autarkic statist authoritarianism on the other hand. He then turned to the analysis of the current situation in Russia, stressing the importance of the dominant discourse of "great-powerness."

Economically, that ideology is supported by Russia's wealth of natural resources which allowed Putin's regime to strengthen its grip on power and society during the past two decades and engage in aggressive expansionist politics by waging a war against Ukraine in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and began supporting the separatists in Donbas. That moment marked a decisive anti-Western and anti-modernizing turn which led to the horrifying escalation of the war in February 2022.

It would not be accurate, Rogov contended, to describe Putin's ideology in terms of Russian ethnic nationalism. Instead, he suggested the term "state nationalism," based on an imperialistic understanding of nationality, which he succinctly formulated as "a strong state is the right state, while a weak state is a wrong state." Using this conceptual framework, Russian imperialist ideologists were able to integrate the diverse periods of Russian and Soviet history into one continuous narrative of the "strong state" starting with the rule of Ivan the Terrible and leading, through Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Stalin, directly to Putin.

> With the outbreak of the war in February 2022, [Professor Kirill Rogov] had to flee Russia fearing persecution for his views.



Congratulations -



McKenna Marko, Ph.D. Slavic '22, is the 2022 winner of the Association for Women in Slavic Studies (AWSS) Prize for the Best Graduate Essay for her dissertation chapter "Mediating Gendered Landscapes of Pain and Trauma: Women's Testimonies from Goli otok and Sveti Grgur." The prize committee commented that this work is to be commended not only for recentering women's voices in this history but for bringing an exceptionally sophisticated theoretical lens to bear on her analysis. Congratulations McKenna!

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# Welcome -

### New Graduate Students: Fall 2022



Aristea Kola received a M.A. in International and Regional Studies with a specialization in the REES area from the University of Michigan in 2022. She previously received a Bachelor's and a second Master's degree in Literature from the University of Tirana, Albania, specializing in Theory and Literary Critique. Since then she has published several articles, participated in some creative writing workshops, and published poetries in an anthology of young poets in Albania. Her interests include 20th-century Russian literature, Russian women writers, prison literature under communism, dissident poetry, underground literature, poets of the drawer, samizdat and tamizdat, the role of propaganda in literature, literature of exile, literature as resistance, and literature as cultural memory. She also likes to explore the influences of Greek Mythology on Russian and Eastern Europe literatures, and make comparative approaches to the Balkans, in particular Albanian literature.

In her free time, Aristea likes to translate from Italian, experiment with her camera as an amateur nature photographer, and listen to classical and jazz music.



A'Yanna Solomon graduated from Goucher College in 2022 with a B.A. in Russian and Spanish. Their current research interests examine media and popular cultures of and relating to Eurasia and Latin America through the areas of sociolinguistics / anthropology, comic studies, and ethnic studies (Romani studies).

In their free time, A'Yanna enjoys learning languages, watching films and television, and reading comic books.

## undergraduate student focus

### **Russian Poetry Day**

Patricia Kalosa, Executive Assistant to the Chair



On Thursday, November 17, 2022, nearly 100 students from our Russian language courses were engaged in the annual Russian Poetry Day at Tisch Hall on U-M's central campus.

This year's poetry event celebrated the

Soviet and Russian poet, writer, musician, novelist, and singer-songwriter Bulat Okudzhava. Students learned about Okudzhava, his biography, his songs, and his importance to Russian culture. Okudzhava (1924-1997), a musician, poet, writer, and novelist of Georgian-Armenian ancestry is considered the spiritual father of Russian singer-songwriters and is almost unanimously revered in Russia and the post-Soviet diaspora. His songs, which come from his experiences as a soldier, pacifist, poet, and novelist of the Second World War, are deeply human; the songs are often profound, heart-wrenching, and touching. When Okudzhava performed the songs in the 1950s, he nearly single-handedly invented the figure of the modern Russian guitar bard.

The event was highlighted by a special guest, Daniel Kahn, who is an Okudzhava devotee. Mr. Khan, who was born in Detroit and attended the University of Michigan, joined the students via Zoom from his current home, a houseboat in Germany. He played the guitar, and an accordion and sang several of Okudzhava's songs, oftentimes with the students joining in as he sang. As he connected with the students, he spoke about his interest in and connection to Okudzhava. Mr. Khan is among a growing crop of English translators of songs of the Soviet poet. The Berlin-based



Daniel Kahn, Performer

Kahn's music mixes Yiddish, English, Russian, and German with a distinctly punk and folk flavor.

Students from our Russian 101, 102, 201, 301, and 401 classes (see photo below) had the opportunity to engage with Mr. Kahn on Zoom, while they took to the front of the room to sing several songs by Okudzhava. It was a remarkable experience for our students who had the opportunity to learn more about the spiritual father of Russian singer-songwriters.

The event was coordinated by Slavic Lecturer and Language Program Director, Svitlana Rogovyk along with Russian instructors Nina Shkolnik, Lena Fort, and Alina Makin. As part of the annual event, Rogovyk created and distributed handmade bags filled with samples of Russian candies and other treats to help the students better immerse themselves in this Russian cultural experience.



## undergraduate student focus

### **Ukrainian Film Series**

Patricia Kalosa, Executive Assistant to the Chair

Each Fall and Winter term, the Slavic Department holds a monthly Ukrainian film series to enrich our students' language and cultural experience. The films series, coordinated by our language program director Svitlana Rogovyk, offers viewing of a wide variety of Ukrainian films; the 2022-23 films to date have included Julia Blue, Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die (Ki6opru: Герої не вмирають) and The Earth Is Blue as an Orange.

During this year's Ukrainian film series, one of the films, Julia Blue, was also included as one of two Ukrainian films in the 29th Annual Ann Arbor Polish Film Festival. The event was held at the State Theater in downtown Ann Arbor. After the film screening, movie goers had the opportunity to meet and discuss the film with director Roxy Toporowych. It was a remarkable time for students to connect with and spend part of an afternoon learning about Ukrainian film and the film-makers' experiences. The film plot revolves around Julia and the special bond she develops with a PTSD-ridden soldier from a war zone in post-revolution Ukraine

Earlier in the fall, as part of the film series, the Slavic department screened *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die (Ki6opru:* 

Герої не вмирають), a 2017 Ukrainian war drama film about the Second Battle of Donetsk Airport during the war in Donbas. The film contains more nuanced scenes than one might expect, and Russian is spoken nearly as much as Ukrainian throughout the film.

In late fall, the film *The Earth Is Blue as an Orange* was shown in the U-M Modern Languages Building. The film's premise, coping with the daily trauma of living in a war-zone, follows a woman and her children as they make a film together about their life in the wartime surroundings. The creative process raises the question of what kind of impact cinema might have during times of disaster, and how to picture war through the camera's lens. *The Earth Is Blue as an Orange* was the winner of the Directing Award for World Cinema Documentary at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and stands not only as a remarkable document of the Russo-Ukrainian War through the lens of a family's creative process, but as an optimistic testament to the power of art and beauty in the face of destruction.

The Ukrainian Film Days will continue into the Winter 2023 term.





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#### Cover Image:

Evacuation, by Kinder Album





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