

## **Personal Essay Statement for the MFA in Social Practice Art at Queens College**

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I'm interested in studying art that approaches social relations as its primary medium, engages with society, addresses major social issues through the collective production of art and is based on community involvement, sensitive collaboration, and social action. As a Ukrainian artist, I am very concerned about the social and security challenges my home country is facing right now. My research and artistic practice aim to respond to these challenges and contribute to the improvement of social cohesion and resilience, strengthen the peacebuilding process and deal with the consequences of the war. Nevertheless, it resists complete instrumentalization by pragmatic reason, ethics, the State, and realpolitik by constantly reexamining historical, social, economic conditions of art production and the influence that state cultural policies have on it. My work further questions the fundamental premises of politics, society, and collective existence dealing with issues connected to history, memory, culture, identity, and their byproducts such as exclusion, othering, marginalization, and stigmatization.

However, I'm still feeling a lack of knowledge, skills, and experience to develop and realize my ideas fully. The education I have previously acquired had no specific focus on participatory art or social practice. I encountered it in a glimpse at several places such as the School for Engaged Art in St. Petersburg (2013), Ashkal Alwan in Beirut (2014-15) and Zurich Academy of the Arts (2017-18), but these were mostly short-term non-graduate programs that did not provide enough time to sufficiently develop my capacities and skills in the relevant direction.

I have been following the Social Practice Queens program, and I am extremely impressed by the activities that are taking place in its framework. It is lead by the strong faculty that includes Professor Gregory Sholette whom I know personally and in whose work I'm interested since I first met him during Ashkal Alwan's HWP Program. Seminars include guest instructors I'm inspired by including Claire Bishop and Grant Kester among others. Students and the faculty are actively involved in real social challenges of New York City and beyond. SPQ Seminars will enable me to understand better the underlying reasons for complex social contradictions and possibilities social practice offers in dealing with them, and SPQ Studio will help to incorporate this knowledge into my artwork providing me with expertise, critical productive environment, and possibilities to realize projects using the school's and partners' facilities.

For me, it is vital to acquire practical experience during my study by implementing projects that would engage people from local communities. The fact that Queens College is located in New York City's most diverse borough of Queens provides many possibilities for that. I'm especially excited by the opportunity to have a collaborative studio in the Queens Museum. In some of my work, I'm addressing the phenomenon of the State, its institutions, and intergovernmental organizations that shape realpolitik, and the building of the Queens Museum was the former headquarters of the United Nations General Assembly. I already have ideas on making an art project there that would reflect on this history and involve communities from the borough.