

“The assault on Russian art and artists is a reactionary campaign fueled by chauvinism and imperialism” – Lohan Gunaweera

Sri Lankan visual and performance artist condemns attacks on Russian art and artists

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The WSWS has received following statement from Lohan Gunaweera, a visual and performance artist and translator in Sri Lanka. He denounces the attacks on Russian art and artists, which, he says, are a part of the US-NATO war preparations against Russia.

I strongly condemn the ongoing assault and censorship on Russian artists, exhibitions and artistic projects, carried out in the name of measures against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Nothing good can come out of censoring great cultural accomplishments ranging from classical music, to 20th century Russian avant-garde art, to Tolstoy. The idea that this could pave the way for a peaceful outcome is as delusional as saying that asphyxiation can prolong life. Personally, as someone who cannot imagine one’s own upbringing and life without Russian literature and art, I find this painful to watch. In the context of world politics, this is a warning symptom of an impending catastrophic stroke.

Contrary to the proclaimed intentions, this assault goes hand in hand with the US and NATO’s imperialist war drive against Russia. A mere glance at the list of countries racing to enter and escalate this conflict, increasing their military budgets and sending weapons to Ukraine, should alarm anyone who is aware of the immense tragedies of the second world war. The United States, the UK, Germany, France are the same imperialist powers that caused extreme havoc and destruction in that war. Over the past 30 years, the US has been the leading destructive actor in numerous wars around the world. The scale of its military involvement within Ukraine, including the operation of biological weapons labs is only now coming to full light. The

imperialist drive has always been directed towards re-partitioning of the Eurasian region (and the rest of the world) in order to gain direct access to its vast resources and markets.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is certainly a reckless, reactionary act that pushes that country toward a massive humanitarian disaster. It however does not exonerate NATO’s central role in drafting the blueprint for this war. Its continuous expansion to the east since the 90s reached a new height with the regime changing coup in Ukraine in 2014. It had no qualms about living together with far-right and neo-Nazi forces in the process.

Living up to its reputation, NATO continues to fuel the unfolding crisis in every possible way. The largest military organisation that has been a permanent fixture in wars around the world is thus playing with fire, increasing the danger of a nuclear war. Throwing support behind the US and NATO does not contribute to any peaceful, democratic outcome.

The campaign to block Russian art and artists poisons the public sphere with anti-Russian sentiments. Russian artists—living or dead—and their works are equated with Vladimir Putin and his military invasion. Its real function is to exploit the widespread high regard for artistic works and artists to hack public opinion in favor of war; to normalise anti-Russian mentality in all aspects of social life and to make people despise everything that is Russian. What we need today is the opposite. The arts must be freed to function as a unifying spiritual force, addressing millions of people, far and wide beyond national borders.

As Julian Assange said, “Nearly every war that has

started in the past fifty years has been the result of media lies... populations don't willingly and with open eyes go into a war." The lies have to be defeated. A broad anti-war movement must be built based on a real, consistent social force that can combat imperialism. That force is the global working class, the class that has no country.

I urge artists and progressive artistic organisations around the world to rally behind this force and defend Russian art and culture against this assault; do not weaken your anti-war stance; do not abandon your correct understanding of NATO's reactionary role. Russia's invasion does not negate any of this. The war drive has to be stopped before it is too late.

I look forward to attending the upcoming online public meeting on March 20, organised by the SEP and IYSSE in Sri Lanka. As announced on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the meeting will review the economic, political and historical background to the war and outline the socialist perspective the working class must fight for, to prevent a global nuclear catastrophe. I urge everyone to be there.



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