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To Resist the Current Without Becoming Petrified

In memory of Davyd Chychkan

Serhiy Kutny

12 August 2025

On 9 August, while repelling an attack by Russian infantry near Zaporizhzhia, the Kyiv anarchist artist Davyd Chychkan was seriously wounded. He died at dawn on 10 August. He was a mortarman at the front. His wife was left with a small child.

I had known Davyd since the time of Yanukovych's presidency. We met in the Autonomous Workers' Union, an organization that tried to unite anarchists and other anti-authoritarians on the basis of syndicalism. We dreamed of becoming a radical wing of the labor movement.

The national-liberal opposition was in a deep knockout. The Soviet nostalgia of the parliamentary communists finally mixed with Moscow Orthodoxy, turning them into conservative "ancestors of the communist rite." The Socialist Party went berserk, flying past parliament.

In this deserted political landscape, it seemed that "stability" would last for decades. During this time, a small group could well have turned into a significant force. We tried to become noticeable

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by doing bright actions with elements of street theater. This creative spirit existed not least thanks to Davyd. Sometimes we even gathered in his workshop on Velyka Zhytomyrska.

To be a convinced anarchist, like Davyd, means to be in the minority almost always. Small radical groups often tend to sectarianism – the desire to hide from society in a narrow circle of absolute like-minded people. Sectarianism was absolutely not inherent in Davyd. He had a rather “populist” character – an interest and a knack for communicating with people of different views.

At that time, this required extraordinary courage: Yanukovych was cultivating the Svoboda party as convenient opponents for himself in the next elections, trying to force the country to choose between bad and even worse. To us, it looked as if the far-right had received a blank cheque to use violence against their street opponents. We became targets. Davyd, being “widely known in narrow circles,” became a target more often than others. Despite this, he was not afraid to “go out to the people,” setting an example of calm civic courage that had nothing to do with a love of “riot porn.” So Davyd was one of the first among us to go to Maidan in 2013, despite the danger from the far-right.

Davyd never gravitated towards incomprehensible experiments with artistic form. His work had something in common with icon painting: the works express, first of all, his beliefs. Artistic snobbery was as alien to Davyd as political snobbery. He did not limit himself to paintings, his work was too cramped in museums. Although critics and gallery visitors appreciated Davyd’s work, he turned to more than just them.

Davyd enthusiastically created campaign posters for rallies, drew graffiti, and designed stickers to reach everyone, so that different people had a chance to be inspired by the ideas of freedom and equality. His post-Maidan work is a document of the political reflection of the Ukrainian anarchist movement. This could not please his opponents: for example, the 2017 exhibition at the Center for Visual Culture was smashed by the far-right,

and in January 2024 the Odesa National Art Museum canceled the exhibition of his works due to threats.

So Davyd joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine not because of, but in spite of, ultranationalists who tried in every way to turn him into an enemy, and on the other hand, in spite of the various “progressive” voices from around the world who come up with explanations why Ukraine should not be defended.

The experience of grassroots socio-political action is, among other things, the experience of knowing and thinking, and a certain intellectual courage is also needed to defend simple and obvious ideas against established stereotypes. Such ideas include the idea that Ukrainian anarchists are in the same boat as the rest of Ukrainian society, because the Ukrainian republic, despite all its problems, is an open future, an opportunity for everyone, including anarchists, to arrange life here according to their own understanding of justice, and not models imposed by someone (after all, republican Spain, for which anarchists fought in the 1930s, was also not an embodied ideal).

Davyd had no lack of intellectual courage: he could resist the current without becoming petrified, and when necessary, this trait of his turned into a military feat.

His death is a great loss for his family, for his friends and like-minded people, for Kyiv and Ukraine. Life for all of us has lost some of its colors. His paintings and our memory remain.