

**THE AESTHETICIZATION OF WAR INFRASTRUCTURE : TAPED WINDOWS AND ANTI-TANK  
HEDGEHOGS IN UKRAINIAN ART AND DESIGN**

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This article analyses the aestheticization of war infrastructure objects – taped windows and anti-tank hedgehogs – in Ukrainian art and design between 2014 and 2026. The study draws on theoretical frameworks including thing theory (B. Brown), new materialism (J. Bennett), the cultural biography of things (I. Kopytoff), the sociology of cultural production (P. Bourdieu), as well as concepts of the aestheticization of politics (W. Benjamin) and affect theory. The article traces the transformation of these objects from functional elements of protection into visual signs circulating across artistic practices, graphic design, and commercial contexts. Particular attention is given to humour as a mechanism of affective normalization of wartime experience and to materiality as a carrier of memory and testimony. The analysis demonstrates that aestheticization performs multiple and sometimes contradictory functions – including critical reflection, commodification, and psychological adaptation – and cannot be reduced to a single meaning. The Ukrainian case, where war is an immediate lived reality rather than a distant spectacle, challenges established Western theoretical models and calls for their reconsideration.

*Key words:* aestheticization, war infrastructure, cultural biography of objects, contemporary Ukrainian art, graphic design, affective normalization, humour, wartime visual culture.

*Statement of the Problem.* The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 produced, among its many consequences, a rapid and visible transformation of the material environment of Ukrainian cities. Anti-tank hedgehogs appeared at intersections and city entrances; windows across the country were taped with adhesive crosses and star patterns in a gesture that combined practical precaution with something closer to ritual. These objects – the iron hedgehog and the taped window – belong simultaneously to the infrastructure of survival and to the grammar of visual culture. Within months of the invasion, both had migrated from street corners and apartment facades into artworks, graphic design, confectionery, fashion collaborations, and institutional identity systems. This migration raises a set of questions that are both theoretically significant and practically urgent: under what conditions does an object of war infrastructure become an aesthetic sign? What does this transformation accomplish – and what does it conceal? How does humour function in the commodification of objects associated with threat and destruction? And what is the relationship between aesthetic normalization and the broader processes of social adaptation to prolonged armed conflict?

These questions are not merely art-historical. As Ukraine continues to navigate the social and psychological demands of a war now entering its fourth year since full-scale escalation, the capacity of visual culture to process, manage, and sometimes neutralize traumatic experience has direct consequences for collective memory, political mobilization, and the ethics of representation. The aestheticization of war infrastructure operates across a spectrum from critical artistic practice to commercial trivialization, and the analytical tools required to navigate this spectrum must be drawn from material culture studies, political philosophy, affect theory, and the sociology of cultural production.

*Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.* The theoretical foundations for this inquiry are distributed across several distinct but convergent fields. Bill Brown's foundational essay «Thing Theory» (2001) establishes the key distinction between objects and things: objects are functional, transparent, instrumental, while things emerge at the moment when objects «stop working for us» – when they press back, demand attention, and acquire the density of meaning [8; 4]. Brown's framework is directly applicable to the trajectory of both the taped window and the anti-tank hedgehog: the former ceases to be a functional protective measure and becomes a pattern, a motif, a graphic sign; the latter moves from military infrastructure to visual emblem [8]. The moment of this conversion – from use-value to sign-value, from function to representation – is precisely what requires examination.

Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010) extends this inquiry in a more explicitly political direction. For

Bennett, materials possess what she terms «agentic capacity»: they are not passive substrates upon which human meaning is inscribed but active participants in political and social assemblages [3; 20–23]. Shattered glass, rusted iron, concrete – these materials do not simply reflect the war; they participate in the production of meaning about the war [3]. Bennett's political ecology of things provides a framework for understanding why works made from actual window glass collected after missile strikes (as in the practice of Oleksandr Dolhyi) carry a different epistemological and ethical weight than works that represent the same glass through other means. Tim Ingold's argument against a static conception of materiality (2007) further refines this framework by emphasizing the processual dimension of materials: glass is not a fixed substance but a flow, a transformation, a history of becoming [15; 1–3]. War, in Ingold's terms, is itself a massive transformation of the material environment – and art made from war debris participates in and documents this transformation rather than simply depicting it from outside [15].

«The political philosophy of aestheticization has its foundational text in Walter Benjamin's famous formulation that fascism aestheticizes politics. Benjamin's warning, developed in «The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility» (1936/2003), concerns the conversion of political violence into spectacle – the rendering of destruction as beautiful, sublime, or entertaining in ways that produce consent rather than critique [2]. The aestheticization of survival infrastructure in wartime Ukraine must be read against this warning, even – or especially – when the aestheticization in question proceeds from the position of the threatened rather than the threatening. The question is not whether aestheticization is occurring, but what kind of political work it is doing; whether it functions as critical distancing, as affective normalization, as commercial exploitation, or as a form of collective meaning-making that resists all three categories.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production (1993, 1986) provides the structural framework for understanding how objects move through fields of value [6; 7]. The anti-tank hedgehog, as it travels from military context to gallery installation to fashion collaboration to Christmas ornament, accumulates and transforms different forms of capital – social, symbolic, economic [6]. Bourdieu's concept of the field allows for a non-reductive account of this circulation: the same object can function very differently depending on the field in which it is positioned, the agents who deploy it, and the relations of power that govern the field's logic [7].

Igor Kopytoff's essay «The Cultural Biography of Things» (1986) offers perhaps the most directly applicable analytical instrument for tracking this circulation. Kopytoff proposes treating objects as having biographies – trajectories through different social contexts, meanings, and statuses – rather than fixed, essential identities [21; 66–67]. The anti-tank hedgehog is an exemplary Kopytoffian object: over the course of a decade, it has been a weapon, a barrier, an installation material, a graphic sign, a souvenir, a fundraising instrument, a national symbol, and a Christmas decoration. Each of these identities is real; none is exhaustive; and the tensions between them are analytically productive [21].

The humorous and affective dimensions of this circulation have received less systematic attention in the existing literature on Ukrainian wartime culture. Henri Bergson's account of laughter as a «social corrective» (1911) provides a starting point: humour functions to manage anxiety, to maintain social cohesion in the face of threat, and to reduce the cognitive and emotional weight of objects and situations that would otherwise be overwhelming [4]. Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren's «benign violation theory» (2010) offers a more precise mechanism: something is funny when it is simultaneously a violation (of norms, expectations, safety) and benign (manageable, non-threatening, contained) [22; 1141]. The anti-tank hedgehog as Christmas ornament, as caramel chocolate confection, as Lego construction – each of these instantiations involves exactly this structure: the violation is the weapon, the lethality, the military function; the benign frame is the domesticity, the sweetness, the playfulness. Sianne Ngai's work on minor affects and aesthetic categories (2005, 2012) extends this analysis: her account of «cuteness» as a mode of managing relations with objects that are simultaneously appealing and potentially threatening is directly relevant to the proliferation of stylized hedgehog imagery in Ukrainian visual culture [23; 24].

What remains unresolved in the existing scholarship is the relationship between these different registers of aestheticization – the critical artistic practice, the commercial commodification, and the affective normalization – and the specific historical and political context of Ukrainian wartime culture. Most theoretical frameworks for the aestheticization of war derive from Western European and North American contexts in which war is an elsewhere, a spectacle transmitted through media rather than a material reality of daily life [5]. The Ukrainian case is different: the aestheticization is being performed by people for whom the hedgehog is not an exotic military object but a familiar presence on their street corner, and for whom the taped window is not a historical image but a lived experience. This difference has consequences for how we should read the aestheticization – consequences that this article undertakes to explore.

*Aim of the Article.* This article aims to analyse the aestheticization of two war-infrastructure objects – the taped window and the anti-tank hedgehog – in Ukrainian art and design from 2014 to 2026, with particular attention to the relationship between critical artistic practice, affective normalization, and commercial commodification. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks outlined above, the article traces the cultural biographies

of both objects across a range of media and contexts, from early responses to the 2014 Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine to the proliferation of hedgehog imagery in the aftermath of the 2022 full-scale invasion. The article argues that the aestheticization of these objects performs multiple and sometimes contradictory functions: it enables collective processing of traumatic experience; it generates forms of symbolic capital that circulate within and beyond the Ukrainian art world; it produces affective normalization through humour and domestication; and, in the most critically sophisticated practices, it maintains the tension between these functions rather than resolving it in favour of any one. The article contributes to the growing literature on wartime art in Ukraine [5; 25] by providing a theoretically grounded comparative analysis of specific artistic practices and a framework for distinguishing between aestheticization as critique and aestheticization as anaesthesia.

*The Taped Window: From Protective Practice to Aesthetic Sign.* The practice of taping windows with adhesive tape in an X or star pattern predates the full-scale invasion of 2022, though it acquired new urgency and visibility after February 24 of that year. The gesture belongs to a lineage of protective practices that combine practical and magical-ritualistic dimensions: the tape does not, in fact, provide meaningful protection against the blast wave of a nearby explosion, a fact that most Ukrainians who performed the gesture understood perfectly well. Its function was therefore simultaneously rational (it reduces the risk of flying glass to some degree) and symbolic (it marks the window as attended to, the home as defended, the inhabitant as present and active).

It is precisely this ambiguity – between practical measure and ritual gesture, between protection and its performance – that Daria Koltsova's 2015 installation «Theory of Protection» identifies and makes the subject of art [17]. Koltsova, working in the context of the 2014–2015 period when the war in eastern Ukraine was ongoing but had not yet reached the major cities of western and central Ukraine, assembled a composition of glass objects onto which adhesive tape had been applied in graphic ornamental patterns. The installation incorporated audio recordings of Ukrainian archaic incantations and documentary photographs sourced from the internet. The conceptual move is precise: Koltsova draws out the mythological-animistic dimension of the taping practice, connecting the gesture of marking glass with tape to the much older tradition of protective incantations and magical marking. «In these ornaments, in the unconfirmed belief in their protective potential, in the incomprehensible form and algorithm of their application, fragments of mythological consciousness are revealed – the consciousness to which a person of the 21st century turns in a state of helplessness and fear» [17]. The tape becomes an index of psychological state – of the turn toward magical thinking that occurs when rational protections have been exhausted or are understood to be inadequate.

Brown's thing theory illuminates the structure of this gesture: the window, in normal circumstances, is a transparent object – functional, invisible, instrumental. The moment of crisis converts it into a thing: the glass demands attention, the question of its fragility becomes urgent, the body turns toward it [8; 4]. The tape is the mark of this conversion – an inscription of vulnerability on the surface of the object, a making-visible of what the object is under threat. Koltsova's installation takes this inscription as its subject: the ornamental patterns traced in tape become a form of writing, a graphic language that speaks the experience of exposure.

After 2022, two artists pursued the aesthetic potential of taped glass in significantly different directions, both of which reward close attention. Daria Koltsova – who had already established her practice with glass and tape in 2015 – continued to work with stained glass and glass postcards, producing objects that are explicitly aesthetic and even decorative in their orientation [18, 19, 20]. Her «Postcards from Ukraine» series uses window glass from the Khanenko Museum to create stained-glass pieces that represent the image of a window taped with duct tape [19]. The gesture is one of memorial aestheticization: the glass that was once a window in a museum that survived bombardment becomes the material of an art object that commemorates the survival of the window, the building, the collection, and the city. The tape pattern, rendered in the vocabulary of stained glass – a medium historically associated with sacred spaces and with the filtering of light through colour – acquires a new symbolic weight. The ornamental logic of stained glass and the improvised geometry of protective tape occupy the same visual field, and the resulting objects are simultaneously decorations and documents.

Oleksandr Dolhyi approaches the same material from the opposite direction. Rather than aestheticizing the tape pattern, he works with the shattered glass itself – collecting fragments from the windows of buildings struck by missiles, preserving the traces of paint and scratches that mark the glass as having been part of a specific window in a specific building, and assembling these fragments into compositions and sculptures [10]. His practice is explicitly documentary and memorial: «I want this to be recorded as a document of time. My works will be a reminder of what we survived» [9]. The shattered glass functions, in Dolhyi's account, not as aesthetic material but as evidence – as what remains after the protective gesture failed, as the index of a violence that the tape could not prevent. The beauty of his «Mountains of Glass» is, in his words, «tragic beauty»: it is beauty that insists on its own context, that refuses the neutralization that pure aestheticization would provide [9].

The contrast between these two practices – Koltsova's decorative memorialization and Dolhyi's documentary evidence – maps onto a broader tension in the aestheticization of war materials. Both practices involve making art from the materials of the war; both produce objects that circulate in the art world and carry

cultural and economic value. But they orient differently to the question of what aestheticization is for. Koltsova's glass postcards can be given as gifts, can be sent as communications, can function as beautiful objects that carry the war within them but do not require that the war be the primary experience of the encounter with them [19; 20]. Dolhyi's sculptures insist on the war as primary: the scratches and paint traces on the glass are not incidental but essential, and the act of collecting fragments from Sumy and Kherson – receiving boxes of debris from people who respond to his Instagram requests – builds a distributed memorial that is as much about community and testimony as it is about the sculptural properties of broken glass [9].

Dima Tolkachov offers a third position, working not with taped glass but with the OSB boards that replace shattered windows in heavily bombarded cities. His 2025 work «Because It Is Pointless» applies aluminium tape to OSB boards in patterns that echo both the original window-taping gesture and the material's function as a replacement for glass that no longer exists [29]. The work emerges from his experience of living in Kharkiv, where OSB boards have become more common than glass in some areas – where the infrastructure of temporary repair has become the permanent condition of the city. The aluminium tape on OSB is both a quotation of the original protective gesture and its negation: there is no glass to protect anymore, no window to preserve, only a surface that marks the absence of what was once there. Tolkachov writes of the «rescuing frame» – the capacity of consciousness to narrow its focus in order to manage an excess of the previously unseen – and his work both enacts and interrogates this capacity [28]. The tape becomes a frame, a mechanism of attention, a tool for making bearable what would otherwise be overwhelming.

*The Anti-Tank Hedgehog: A Cultural Biography.* The Czech hedgehog – the anti-tank «yizhak» in Ukrainian, the three-dimensional six-pointed cross welded from rolled steel that was first deployed in the Second World War – returned to the streets of Ukrainian cities in the spring of 2022, deployed at intersections and city entrances as a physical barrier against armoured vehicles. The objects that appeared in Kyiv in March 2022 included some that had been taken from the collection of the National Museum of History of Ukraine, where they had been preserved since 1941. This detail – that the same hedgehogs were deployed eighty-one years apart, that the museum artefact became functional military infrastructure and then, presumably, would return to the museum – encapsulates the peculiar temporality of the hedgehog's cultural biography [16].

Kopytoff's framework of the cultural biography of things is ideally suited to tracing this trajectory. In his account, the social life of things involves phases of commoditization and singularization, periods in which objects are exchangeable equivalents and periods in which they are unique, inalienable, sacred [21; 73–75]. The hedgehog moves through these phases repeatedly and simultaneously: it is at once a standardized military object (exchangeable, mass-produced, functional) and a singularized cultural symbol (unique, national, inalienable). The tension between these phases is generative of its aesthetic and political life [1; 21].

The earliest artistic engagement with the hedgehog in the current conflict to be documented here is Olia Fedorova's 2017 paper sculpture series «Defense» [11]. Fedorova, working from Kharkiv during the period of the Donbas conflict, made hedgehogs from paper and photographed them in landscape settings. The conceptual logic is explicit: she deploys the classic conceptual strategy of depriving an object of its function by changing its material. A paper hedgehog cannot stop a tank. But the point is not the inadequacy of the paper hedgehog as a military object; it is the adequacy of the paper hedgehog as a figure for the experience of living under a threat that one cannot directly counter. «I felt as though I was protected from it by the idea that 'this is a local conflict, it doesn't affect us' – but it felt like a paper hedgehog, something fake that would collapse as soon as real danger approached, or even earlier, because it would simply get wet in the snow» [from personal message, March 2026]. The fragility of the paper is the fragility of the psychological protection. The hedgehog is not a weapon in Fedorova's work; it is a figure of wishful thinking, of the desire for protection that exceeds one's actual capacity to be protected.

This early work – made in 2017, before the full-scale invasion – is notable for several reasons. It demonstrates that the hedgehog had already acquired symbolic significance in Ukrainian artistic consciousness before 2022 [11]; it models a critical relationship to the object that refuses both heroization and trivialization; and it establishes the conceptual move – material substitution as a way of exposing the inadequacy of actual protections – that will recur in various forms in subsequent work.

After 2022, the hedgehog proliferates across media and registers with an intensity that reflects both the object's new material presence in the city and the need to process that presence. The practices under examination here range from the clearly critical to the explicitly commercial, with a large and heterogeneous middle territory occupied by works that are neither straightforwardly one nor the other [25].

Anton Kariuk's «My Anti-Tank Hedgehog» project (2022) represents one of the most considered early responses [16]. Kariuk produced forty hedgehog sculptures from smoky quartz – a material associated with protection and spiritual clarity in various esoteric traditions – with the explicit intention of raising funds for the Ukrainian military. The edition of forty copies corresponded to forty days of war; the final number was intended to equal the number of days until the hedgehogs in the streets returned to the museum. This temporal framing is remarkable: it assumes the end of the war as a horizon, marks the duration of the conflict in the number of objects

produced, and imagines the museum – the space of the sacred and the historical – as the rightful destination of the hedgehog, its singularized form [16; 21]. The use of smoky quartz connects the militarized hedgehog to a tradition of protective and apotropaic objects, echoing Koltsova's earlier observation about the animistic dimensions of protective practices [17]. The work is simultaneously a fundraising instrument, a commemoration, a critique of commercial aestheticization (by converting it into something else), and an act of forward-looking imagination.

The commercial and graphic-design dimension of hedgehog aestheticization is richly documented in the material gathered here. Ievhen Toniev's «Christmas card» from December 2022 combines the forms of a Lego constructor, a snowflake, and a hedgehog into a holiday greeting [30] – an image whose logic is precisely that of the benign violation: the hedgehog is a weapon (violation) rendered in the vocabulary of childhood play and winter celebration (benign) [22; 1141]. The effect is not, or not only, funny; it is also a way of acknowledging that the hedgehog has become part of the fabric of everyday life, that it exists alongside Christmas decorations and children's toys rather than in a separate, hermetically sealed space of military reality.

Pavlo Reznik's New Year's illustration of a tree ornament in the shape of a hedgehog (December 2022) extends this logic [26], with the telling detail that commenters expressed a desire for actual such ornaments to exist – a desire that the image itself had generated. This is the generative power of the visual in the context of collective processing: the image does not merely represent an already-existing desire but produces the desire it depicts [26]. The hedgehog ornament that does not yet exist becomes, through the image, something that should exist, something whose existence would be both funny and appropriate, a way of marking the year that has passed without denying its horror and without being consumed by it.

The Honey Café's confectionery hedgehogs – described as «anti-anxiety, made of caramel chocolate, almond praline, peanut butter, and caramel inside» and explicitly positioned as therapeutic objects that «help preserve your mood and calm» [12] – represent the furthest extension of the domesticating logic. The response to this product was, the available documentation notes, mixed – suggesting that the appetite for this kind of affective normalization is not unlimited, that the community has its own sense of where the line between permissible humour and inappropriate trivialization falls. Bergson's social corrective cuts in both directions: laughter can release anxiety, but the community can also correct excessive laughter that threatens to dissolve the seriousness of what is being processed [4].

The commercial public art collective's project «Reassembling the Urban» (2022), displayed in the parking lot of the PinchukArtCentre, takes a different approach to the same material. By combining familiar urban furniture – benches, lanterns, road posts – with concrete blocks and hedgehogs, and then extending the project into the exhibition space where visitors can rearrange virtual 3D models of these elements, the project makes legible the transformation of the urban environment that the war has produced. The hedgehog is not isolated as a symbolic object but placed in its actual context – alongside the other objects that have been added to the city's street furniture by the emergency – and the participatory dimension of the installation invites visitors to engage with the question of what the city now is and what it might be. This is a more explicitly spatial and critical practice than the commercial hedgehog aestheticization, but it shares with it the interest in integration – in finding ways to think about the hedgehog as part of the city rather than as an interruption of it [7].

Zakentii Horobiiiov's graphic series provides a further example of what might be called affirmative aestheticization – a practice that acknowledges the violence and difficulty of the war while insisting on the vitality and beauty of the city and its inhabitants [13; 14]. His «Kyiv Spring» 2022 series and the subsequent «Wartime Kyiv» series use acrylic, aerosol, and markers to create works in which hedgehogs, checkpoints, and destroyed buildings coexist with saturated colours, lush vegetation, and human figures who «have not lost their sense of humour» [14]. The collagist technique – assembling fragments of observation from different moments and locations – is formally appropriate to the experience of living in a city under bombardment, where the continuity of normal life is constantly interrupted and reassembled. Horobiiiov's work does not deny the war; it insists that the city is more than the war, that life continues alongside and through the military infrastructure [13; 14].

Tolkachov's photographic series «Invisible» (2023) occupies a different position in this landscape. The UV printing on rusted iron hedgehogs – capturing the complementary green of spring grass against the rust – explores the perceptual normalization of the hedgehog: after a year of daily coexistence with these objects, one stops noticing the contrast that was initially striking [27]. The work functions as both a documentation of this normalization and a corrective to it: by foregrounding the visual qualities of the hedgehog that have become invisible through familiarity, Tolkachov reactivates the capacity to see the object [28]. This is a practice of de-normalization through aestheticization – using the aesthetic encounter to restore the cognitive and emotional impact that daily life has eroded.

*Institutional Aestheticization and the Symbolic Capital of War Infrastructure.* «The Women in Arts: The Resistance» award (2023) represents a particularly telling instance of institutional aestheticization [31]. The ceremony's identity system — designed around the three symbols of the taped window, the anti-tank hedgehog, and sandbags protecting cultural monuments – deploys these objects as a graphic vocabulary for resistance, care, and cultural continuity. The choice of the hedgehog and the taped window as visual emblems of an award for

women in the arts brings together the military and the cultural, the practical and the symbolic, in a way that positions resistance as a shared condition of both armed defence and artistic practice. The slogan «Fire does not burn those who are fervent» frames the connection explicitly: the same quality – burning intensity, fervent commitment – characterizes both military resistance and artistic practice under conditions of war [31].

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital is directly applicable here [6; 7]. The hedgehog and the taped window have accumulated, through the processes documented in the preceding sections, a substantial charge of symbolic capital in the Ukrainian cultural field: they are associated with resilience, resistance, collective experience, and the ability to maintain life under conditions of extreme threat [7]. By incorporating these objects into an institutional identity system, the «Women in Arts» ceremony draws on this accumulated capital and deploys it in the service of its own legitimation. This is not a cynical move – the connection between the award's purpose and the symbols it employs is genuine – but it is a move that reveals how thoroughly the aestheticization of war infrastructure has been integrated into the cultural field's own self-representation [7].

The «Reassembling the Urban» project's location at the PinchukArtCentre, and the «Postcards from Ukraine» series' use of glass from the shattered Khanenko Museum windows, both involve the institutional art world in the circulation of war-infrastructure aesthetics. The museum and the commercial gallery are fields with their own logics of value production [7], and the entry of war-infrastructure objects into these fields transforms both the objects and the fields. The objects acquire the legitimacy and visibility of institutional recognition; the institutions acquire the moral authority and contemporary relevance of engagement with the war [5].

*The Ethics of Aestheticization: Between Critique and Anaesthesia.* The range of practices documented in this article spans a spectrum from critical artistic engagement to commercial trivialization, with a great deal of complex, ambivalent material in between. What criteria are available for distinguishing between aestheticization as critique and aestheticization as anaesthesia?

Benjamin's warning about the aestheticization of politics provides one criterion: aestheticization becomes politically dangerous when it produces spectacle that substitutes for political analysis and action, when beauty becomes a reason to accept violence rather than a reason to examine it [2]. Dolhyi's insistence on the documentary function of his work – on the scratches and paint traces of the glass as evidence rather than texture – is an explicit refusal of this logic: the aesthetic encounter with his sculptures is intended to produce knowledge and memory rather than to substitute for them [9].

Bennett's framework of vibrant matter provides another criterion: aestheticization that acknowledges the agentic capacity of materials – their participation in political meaning-making rather than their passive submission to human aesthetic projects – is more adequate to the reality of war debris than aestheticization that treats materials as neutral substrates for symbolic projection [3]. Fedorova's paper hedgehogs explicitly engage with the material properties of paper (fragility, wetness, collapse) as a way of thinking about the inadequacy of protective practices [11]; Dolhyi's collected glass insists on the specific histories embedded in specific fragments [9; 10]. Both practices take seriously the materiality of what they work with [3; 15].

Ngai's analysis of cuteness as an aesthetic category points toward a third criterion. Cuteness, she argues, is an aesthetic mode that involves a subtle exercise of power over its object: the cute object is appealing precisely because it is small, manageable, non-threatening – because it has been reduced to a scale at which it cannot harm us [24]. The cute hedgehog souvenir, the hedgehog Christmas ornament, the hedgehog confection, are all instances of cuteness as a mode of managing the threat that the object represents [12; 30]. This management is not intrinsically wrong – it may be psychologically necessary, socially adaptive, and culturally generative [22; 4]. But it is a management that involves a specific relationship of power to the object, and critical aestheticization will be attentive to this relationship rather than unconscious of it [23; 24].

The most sophisticated practices in this survey – Fedorova's paper hedgehogs, Dolhyi's collected glass, Tolkachov's invisible hedgehogs and OSB boards, Koltsova's 2015 installation – share a quality of critical self-consciousness about the aestheticization they perform [11, 9, 27, 29, 17]. They do not simply convert war infrastructure into art; they investigate the conditions and consequences of this conversion, using the aesthetic encounter to produce questions rather than to provide comfort. This does not make them more valuable than the commercial and humorous practices; it makes them differently functional, oriented toward different ends [8; 21].

*Conclusions.* This article has traced the cultural biographies of two objects – the taped window and the anti-tank hedgehog – through Ukrainian art and design from 2014 to 2026, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of thing theory, vibrant matter, the cultural biography of things, the aestheticization of politics, and affect theory to analyse the processes by which these objects have acquired and transformed aesthetic significance [8; 3; 21; 2; 23; 24].

The principal findings are as follows. First, the aestheticization of war infrastructure in Ukraine is not a single phenomenon but a heterogeneous field of practices, ranging from critical artistic engagement to commercial commodification, with a large intermediate territory occupied by works that combine elements of both [5; 25]. These practices cannot be evaluated by a single criterion; they require analysis of their

specific contexts, their orientations, and the cultural functions they perform [7; 8].

Second, humour plays a central and underanalysed role in the aestheticization of war infrastructure. The benign-violation structure of hedgehog humour – the simultaneous presence of the military threat and the domestic or playful frame – is a culturally specific response to the challenge of integrating the war into everyday life [22; 4]. This integration is neither straightforward acceptance nor straightforward resistance; it is a process of ongoing negotiation between the demands of survival and the demands of psychological coherence [23].

Third, the material dimension of these practices matters. Works that take seriously the specific histories and properties of the materials they use – the scratches on collected glass, the fragility of paper in the snow, the rust accumulating on iron in the spring – produce different kinds of knowledge and memory than works that treat war materials as arbitrary symbolic vehicles [3; 15]. A theory of wartime aestheticization must be, in part, a theory of materials [3; 8].

Fourth, institutional aestheticization – the incorporation of war-infrastructure imagery into the identity systems of cultural institutions and award ceremonies – represents a significant dimension of this field that has not previously received systematic attention [31]. The deployment of the hedgehog and the taped window as symbols of resistance and cultural vitality reflects and reinforces their accumulated symbolic capital [6; 7] while raising questions about the relationship between aesthetic and political dimensions of resistance [2].

Fifth and finally, the Ukrainian case challenges theoretical frameworks developed in contexts where war is an elsewhere rather than a material daily reality [5]. The aestheticization of war infrastructure in Ukraine is being performed by people for whom the hedgehog is a familiar street presence, the taped window a lived experience, the shattered glass a neighbourhood event. This embodied proximity to the material reality of war produces forms of aestheticization that are neither the heroizing romanticism of distant observers nor the traumatic realism of pure witness, but something more complex and more adaptive – a culture finding ways to see and to go on seeing what it is living through [25].

The most urgent direction for further research concerns the long-term fate of these aesthetic practices: what happens to the cultural biography of the hedgehog when the war ends, when the objects are removed from the streets, when the taped windows are replaced or the glass mended? Kopytoff's framework suggests that singularization – the conversion of exchangeable objects into unique, inalienable, sacred things – is likely to intensify rather than diminish in the post-war period [21; 73–75]. The hedgehog that returns to the museum will carry a different weight than the one that left it. How Ukrainian visual culture navigates this weight – and what critical practices it develops to do so – will be a defining question for the field in the years to come [5; 25].

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### ЕСТЕТИЗАЦІЯ ІНФРАСТРУКТУРИ ВІЙНИ : ЗАКЛЕСНІ ВІКНА ТА ПРОТИТАНКОВІ ЇЖАКИ В УКРАЇНСЬКОМУ МИСТЕЦТВІ І ДИЗАЙНІ

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Досліджено процес естетизації об'єктів воєнної інфраструктури – заклеєних вікон і протитанкових їжаків – у сучасному українському мистецтві та дизайні в період 2014–2026 років. Аналіз здійснено на перетині теорії речей (Б. Браун), нових матеріалізмів (Дж. Беннет), концепції культурної біографії речей (І. Копітофф), соціології культурного виробництва (П. Бурдьє), а також теорій естетизації політики (В. Беньямін) і афектів. Простежено трансформацію цих об'єктів із функціональних елементів захисту та виживання у знаки візуальної культури, що циркулюють між художніми практиками, графічним дизайном, комерційною продукцією та інституційною символікою. На основі аналізу конкретних мистецьких кейсів (Д. Кольцова, О. Долгий, О. Федорова, Д. Толкачов та ін.) виявлено різні модуси естетизації: критичний, меморіальний, афективно-нормалізуючий та комерційний. Особливу увагу приділено ролі гумору як механізму афективної адаптації, що функціонує за принципом «безпечного порушення», а також матеріальності об'єктів як носію пам'яті, свідчення і досвіду руйнування. Показано, що естетизація воєнної інфраструктури виконує множинні й суперечливі функції: сприяє колективному осмисленню травматичного досвіду, генерує символічний капітал, інтегрує воєнні об'єкти у повсякденність і водночас ризикує їхньою тривіалізацією. Доведено, що український контекст, у якому війна є безпосередньо прожитою реальністю, проблематизує універсальність західних теоретичних моделей естетизації та вимагає їх критичного переосмислення з урахуванням досвіду повсякденного співіснування з об'єктами війни.

*Ключові слова:* естетизація, воєнна інфраструктура, культурна біографія об'єктів, мистецтво України, графічний дизайн, афективна нормалізація, гумор, візуальна культура війни.

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