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СТАТЬИ

Yellow-blue smoke over Moscow. How Danila Tkachenko's performance failed and his friend went to jail

The World Press Photo laureate Danila Tkachenko had been planning an anti-war protest on Victory Day. However, the act was thwarted by law enforcement officers. Later, they arrested the artist's friend, Grigory Mumrikov, who was considered his partner in crime. Tkachenko insists he had been preparing the protest alone. He has left Russia. Meanwhile, Mumrikov faces the prospect of five years in prison.

Текст на русском

The plan was to cover the parade on May 9, 2022, with a yellow-blue smoke. In order to fulfill this idea, Tkachenko rented an apartment on Tverskaya, 4, bought various equipment, installed several air conditioners and planted smoke bombs inside them. Everything would be started up remotely; the artist fled from Russia.

«May 9 is an important holiday. Today it is unjustly appropriated by the Russian government who promote militarism and aggression. I wanted to say no to that and to support Ukraine», Tkachenko explained the meaning of his performance in his interview to «Medusa».

On May 13 he posted a photoshopped image of what the protest could have looked like.



The protest as planned by Danila Tkachenko / Collage by Danila Tkachenko

However, nothing worked out: law enforcement representatives entered the apartment. Later, intelligence officers told the activist that they began following him immediately after his purchase of remotely controlled GSM sockets. According to security officials, sellers of such goods

are required to report all the buyers to the FSB (The Federal Security Service). It is still unclear though why Danila was allowed to leave the country.

On May 9, a criminal case was initiated against an unidentified person under an article on attempted hooliganism committed by a group of people motivated by ideological hatred (part 2 of article 213 of the Criminal Code with the application of part 3 of article 30 of the Criminal Code). The maximum sentence under the second part of the article on hooliganism is seven years in prison, although in case of an attempt the court cannot impose a sentence of more than three quarters of the maximum. Subsequently, Tkachenko became a suspect and then the accused party.

«Tkachenko... committed an attempt at hooliganism ... a gross violation of public order, expressing a clear disrespect for society, committed on the grounds of political, ideological hatred, by a group of persons by prior agreement, using items as weapons ... Entered into a preliminary agreement with Mumrikov ... at an unspecified time ... they acquired pyrotechnic devices, a Smoke Pot Blue smoke fountain, and also rented a living space ... creating conditions for committing an intentional crime on the territory adjacent to the territory of the celebration of the 77th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, as well as the Immortal Regiment campaign. Further, in implementing their plan, they intended to express a clear disrespect for society, publicly demonstrating disregard for society's legal and moral norms, immoral motives, with the aim of intimidating, as well as visually and mentally influencing those who take part in the celebration... the devices did not work as they were supposed to according to their technical characteristics and did not produce the intended negative effect on citizens, » says the accusation order dated June 2.

Searches followed in the apartments of Tkachenko's mother, his girlfriend and her relatives, as well as in the apartments where the artist lived and was registered. In the latter two places, the doors were broken down. Flash drives and computers were confiscated. As Tkachenko says, the police threatened his mother with imprisonment if he does not come back to Russia.

«WHERE IS YOUR FRIEND THE ACTIVIST?»

On the night of May 10, Tkachenko's friend Grigory Mumrikov was returning from a long rehearsal with his friends Daniil Zinchenko and his wife Maria [name changed at her request]. They had been working for many hours on an opera called «Marshrut» (Route) — an interpretative tour of the Moscow park «Losiny Ostrov» (Elk Island). What happened next we know from the words of Daniil and Maria.

When Mumrikov stops the car in Maly Trekhsvyatitelsky Lane, a Skoda Octavia appears from behind, blinding them with high beams. Zinchenko leaves his car, and six strong men in civilian clothes run out of the Skoda and put him face down on the asphalt. They also drag Mumrikov out of the car, beat him in the stomach and lay him face down as well, turning a gun on his head.

«Weapon! Where is the weapon?! Look for weapons!», the attackers shout while pulling Mumrikov out of his car.

Maria remains inside, and the men are a little bit more polite to her: they don't beat her or put her on the ground, they just take her out of the car and twist her arm behind her back. «Keep calm and everything will be fine, » she hears.

Meanwhile, someone yells at Mumrikov aggressively: «Don't resist! Where is your friend the activist?!» Of course, he does not resist: one shoe has fallen off his foot, his face is pressed

to the ground. Mumrikov replies that he does not understand what friend these people are talking about.



Grigory Mumrikov / Photo by Evgenia Chapaikina

The friends think it's a robbery. But then the attackers call the police and take the musicians, each in a separate car, to the police department of the Basmanny district. «Dude, this is some kind of a mistake. You have been confused with someone else, » one of the drivers says to Daniil.

It becomes obvious that this is not a robbery, but a detention. At the station, the police say they had been following the musicians all day because they attended a basement studio in the industrial area. The police considered it suspicious. The operatives call someone: «That's it, wrap up. They rehearsed there, nothing needs to be checked».

Mumrikov is taken away. He is allowed to call his wife Irina and say that he has been detained, but not to answer subsequent calls and messages.

According to Irina, her husband was interrogated about Tkachenko and his girlfriend. Daniil and Maria were also asked

about Tkachenko, whether he had told them that he supports Ukraine. They know him only through Mumrikov and were not aware of his political views. By one in the morning they were released; the policemen apologized.

«Your friend [Tkachenko] was planning a protest that could create a stampede in the crowd, children could suffer. He seemed to be a normal guy, had everything, did he go mental?», one of the senior employees asked the couple. «Well, you can tell your friends what happened. You don't see such a thing every day!»

«LIKE A MARKED ONE»

The police drew up an administrative protocol against Mumrikov — the young man allegedly had cursed on the street (Article 20.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses). He spent the second night at the police station as well, and then, on May 12, the court placed him under administrative arrest for ten days. Mumrikov's defense lawyer from OVD-Info, Alexander Kost, was not allowed to attend the trial.

On the same day, late in the evening, the police searched Mumrikov's country house. As his wife Irina recalls, the security officers were pretty polite. They seized several flash drives and tablets. The search lasted for about two hours; Irina was interrogated about Tkachenko and his girlfriend. In a conversation with OVD-Info, Tkachenko suggested that the security forces were interested in his girlfriend because she had helped him with his other projects.

The police also asked Irina what they did during the May holidays. She said the whole family stayed at home.

On May 13, Tkachenko posted about the criminal case on his Facebook page. On May 17, the court rejected the appeal against Mumrikov's administrative arrest. At the end of the arrest, the musician was taken directly from the detention

center for an interrogation in relation to a criminal case. He was then arrested as a suspect. Later, the detention period was extended for another 72 hours. On May 24, the Tverskoy district court sent Mumrikov to a pre-trial detention center until August 9, and on May 30 he was charged with attempted hooliganism committed by a group of people motivated by ideological hatred (part 2 of article 213 of the Criminal Code with the application of part 3 of article 30 of the Criminal Code).

According to Irina, Mumrikov's wife, at the hearing on the choice of the restraint measure the prosecutor opposed Grigory's placement in a pre-trial detention center.

«We all thought, including the investigator — it was a different one back then — that Grisha would go home. During the trial, his term of detention in the police ended, and he sat with me for two hours while we waited for the court order... The investigator even burst into tears [because of the court decision], » Irina recalls.



Grigory Mumrikov at a court hearing on the choice of a measure of restraint, June 30, 2022 / Courtesy of Mumrikov's friends for OVD-Info

On June 2, Tkachenko was charged in absentia. On July 26, he was arrested — in absentia as well.

On June 30, in the Tverskoy court, Mumrikov's mother, Galina, managed to have a short talk with her son. According to her, he took the detention hard: «He was very irritable. When the judge came in, he started shouting, ``how long will this last? How will I look my children in the eyes?»

During his speech in court, Mumrikov was quite emotional (an audio recording of the speech is at the disposal of OVD-Info) — he called Tkachenko a bastard, told the judge about his respect for veterans and May 9th. «Because of him, I walk around like a marked one, even though I am absolutely clear. I beg, I beg you once again! On June 24, even the prosecutor objected to the arrest, because she looked at the case and realized that it was completely absurd. But for some reason the judge made a different decision: maybe that's some internal politics, I don't know, but why keep an innocent person in prison?», Mumrikov said.

«It's like he's been forced to live someone else's life, and he does not understand why this has happened to him. I talked to him, he has not yet recovered from the shock. I know from my experience that it takes three months to get used to the detention center, » says Mumrikov's current lawyer, Svetlana Sidorkina.

Mumrikov has written to his wife that his cell is poorly lit and his eyesight is deteriorating rapidly. So is his memory: he suffers from insomnia. In addition, he has been placed in an overcrowded cell, where everyone has to take turns to get some sleep.

Irina Mumrikova says that the accusation against her husband is based on two facts. The first is a screenshot from a surveillance camera video showing Mumrikov standing not far from the house where Tkachenko rented an apartment for the protest. That was on May 5. The defense claims that this has nothing to do with the protest: Mumrikov had been waiting for his acquaintance. According to Irina, this acquaintance has already been interrogated (she refused to talk to OVD-Info). In an interview with «Khodorkovsky Live», Irina notes that Grigory spent 9 minutes on Tverskaya. He did not enter the building.

The second fact — according to the examination, Mumrikov's fingerprint was found on one of the boxes in the apartment.

No one knows how it happened.

According to Irina, the last time her husband saw Tkachenko was at the end of April — the artist came to their country house:

«He came for some business, we left him the keys. It was normal for us to leave the keys to friends so that they could work or do something else at our place. That evening we all met for dinner and a chat. The investigator believes that this box is not from our house».

She suggests that the fingerprint could be on the box because Mumrikov and Tkachenko went to Leroy Merlin together in mid-April: «We still have not finished renovating our house and garden, we had to buy something. I don't know what Tkachenko took, but most likely they shared a basket».

Tkachenko cannot explain Mumrikov's fingerprint on the box. He insists that he prepared the protest alone.

«I was told that Grisha would be released if I said that I was working for foreign intelligence. The investigation took him hostage to put pressure on me. They know that I will not return. I didn't talk much to him, even though we're old friends. For the last three years we had been seeing each other once a year. I didn't see him at all in May. I bought that GSM socket on May 4 and immediately took it to that apartment. Grisha's fingerprints could not have ended up on the things that were found in that apartment. I don't understand how this is possible, » Tkachenko says.

FROM ART TO ACTIVISM

Mumrikov's wife, mother and friends confirm that he and Tkachenko have known each other for more than ten years, but didn't meet frequently lately.

They studied together at the photography school of the Izvestia newspaper, and then at the Alexander Rodchenko School of Photography and Multimedia. The young men were friends, but after Grigory got married and had a daughter, he and Danila began to see each other less and less. Mumrikov became interested in music, and Tkachenko began to travel around Russia for photo expeditions.

«I think they had little in common creatively, although Grisha invited him to all his concerts. He is more of a musician, while photography for him was for the money. Working as a photographer for the city hall, he earned decently. As a musician, he would not have earned as much, » Grigory's mother, Galina, says.



Grigory Mumrikov at a concert (on the right), 2019 / Photo by Olga Chuchadeeva

Mumrikov's wife recalls that Tkachenko invited Grigory to go on a trip, but Mumrikov refused because of his family and work. «This was how we socialized: meeting up for some wine and barbecue, nothing more, » Irina explains.

In 2014, Tkachenko won the prestigious World Press Photo award. In 2015, a major photography agency included him in a list of 30 noteworthy photographers under 30. In 2017, Tkachenko literally burned Russian villages: he set fire to abandoned houses and photographed them. He claimed that he observed all security measures and did not touch any private property. The project received mixed reviews, but attracted public attention. Some restorers even called for criminal cases against Tkachenko, under articles on the destruction of cultural heritage objects (Article 243 of the Criminal Code) and deliberate destruction of private property (Article 167 of the Criminal Code).

«I have been working with smoke and fire for a long time. They attract me somehow. I was worried about the centralization of power in Russia. It was a project about decolonization. The death of the village fits into this concept very clearly. But I wouldn't describe the smoke performance as art: it's more about my civic position, it's more like activism, » Tkachenko explains.



Daniil Tkachenko, 2016 / A still from Suomen valokuvataiteen museo

Mutual acquaintances of Mumrikov and Tkachenko who joined the chat in support of the musician claim that Danila's head was briefly turned by his early success. Irina agrees with this:

«When he got star fever, only Grisha stayed by his side, but they never worked on the same art projects. My husband said Tkachenko had some emotional outbursts when he received the World Press Photo. He had some kind of a boyish bravado.»

Mumrikov's mother, Galina, also speaks of her dislike of Tkachenko: «As soon as I found out that it all happened because of Tkachenko's actions, my heart skipped a beat. I didn't like it, because anything could be expected from Tkachenko. I never trusted him, his cold eyes, I did not consider him a great photographer, even though he received the World Press Photo award. A hero abroad, he blasphemes Russia, blasphemes the USSR. Actually, this is his main goal: to promote himself, to belittle our past and put it out of sight. I think so and I can confirm it».

Galina does not consider Tkachenko's protest artistic and calls the artist's plans «activist hooliganism.»

According to mutual acquaintances of Mumrikov and Tkachenko, the latter has highly developed strategic thinking: he understands perfectly how to position his works, make them noticeable and publicly successful. These people characterize Danila as a prudent and hardworking person.

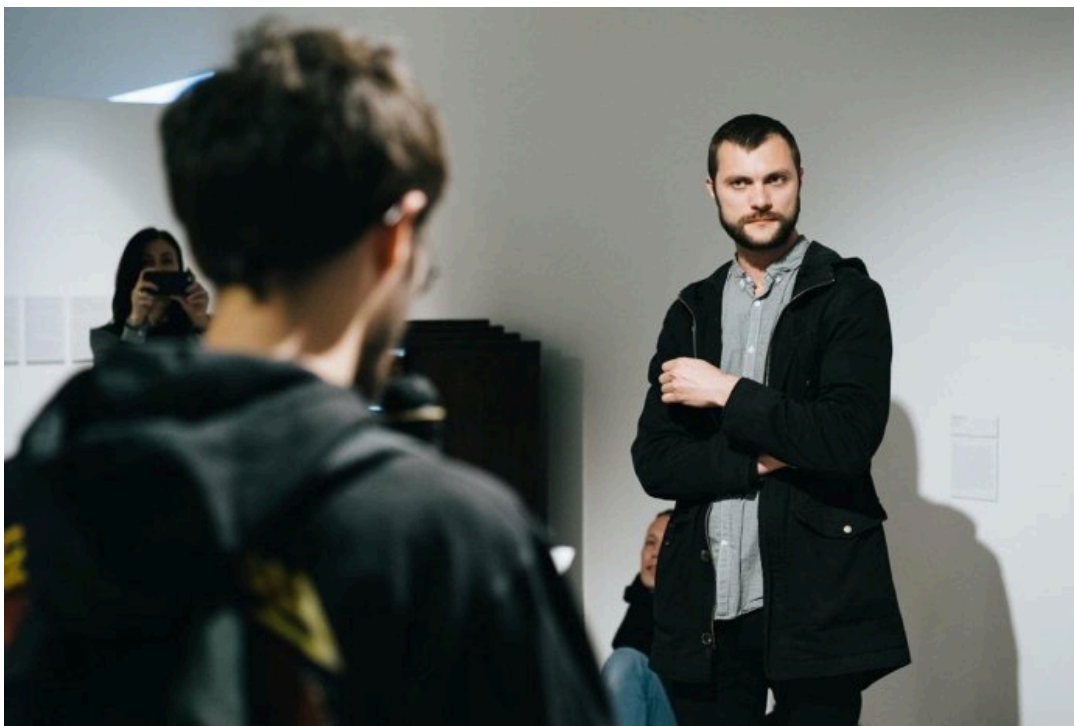
According to Tkachenko, he knows that Grigory and his family are angry with him. He does not write to Mumrikov on purpose, so that the investigation would not have an extra reason to call him an accomplice in the protest.

«I am a human being, so this does upset me, but I cannot say I am surprised. Being in Russia and even just having a different point of view is very difficult at the moment. And

it is especially difficult for those who are under investigation. I understand how colossal the pressure is on Grisha and his family. I just hope that Grisha will be released soon and he will be able to return to normal life. I face a lot of negativity, but many people manage to wake up from this madness. Many people understand that it is not my fault, but a repressive machine that turns people's lives into dust. For this state, it is important to divide. It is important for them to keep everyone in fear, this is one of the reasons for repressions and murders, but I am sure that they will answer for everything, and we need to continue fighting», Tkachenko explains.

At the same time, Irina Mumrikova does not agree with the artist:

«Tkachenko shifts all the blame to the system. But I think that personal responsibility is also very important. If Tkachenko had not been a coward and would have taken responsibility for his actions and words, Grisha would not have been imprisoned. Besides, Tkachenko had not even tried to apologize» (from the interview with «Khodorkovsky Live»).



Grigory Mumrikov and Danya Tkachenko at the theses defense / Photo by Dasha Trofimova, Rodchenko School

«THERE WAS SOME REASON BEHIND THAT»

An appeal has been scheduled for July 27 to extend the preventive measure against Grigory Mumrikov. Lawyer Svetlana Sidorkina believes that the court will take the side of the investigation:

«I think there will be an extension, because there is still a stage of familiarization with the case materials. That takes time as well. Mumrikov knows nothing at all about the circumstances of the case. The previous defense lawyer appealed to the prosecutor's office about the initiation of a criminal case against Mumrikov, as well as about the choice of a measure of restraint and the extension of the period of detention. We are now asking to change the measure of restraint to house arrest».

In the meantime, Mumrikov's friends are launching a Telegram channel and preparing an event in support of their

friend — an auction of contemporary artists' works, an artwork marketplace and an exhibition of Mumrikov's own artworks. Daniil Zinchenko is releasing a short documentary about Grigory and his case.

Mumrikov's wife Irina was left alone with her two-year-old daughter. She has already spent 280 thousand rubles (around 4,700 USD) on lawyers — this is an impressive amount for a young family of modest means.

«Our daughter doesn't let me go, she feels abandoned. She has always been very close to her dad emotionally. She still asks, „where is dad? I miss him. I am tired of waiting“. It's really tough. Also, we have two consumer loans. We took them to build a house, our only home. For the first one we pay back 27 thousand per month, for the second one 47 thousand. I used to be able to pay in 10-30 thousand a month towards the loans, working as a freelancer with a child», Mumrikova says.



Grigory and Irina Mumrikovy with their daughter / Courtesy of Mumrikova



Grigoriy Mumrikov with his daughter / Courtesy of Mumrikova



Grigoriy Mumrikov with his daughter / Courtesy of Mumrikova

Mumrikov's mother, Galina, has left no stone unturned in the effort to save her son. She has reached out to the Investigative Committee, to the Public Prosecutor's Office and even to the Presidential Executive Office. Moreover, she turned to the «Spravedlivaya Rossiya» (A Just Russia) party:

«I said I am aware that Tkachenko will never come back to Russia, but I would strip people like him of the Russian citizenship. He never thought about the consequences of his actions! All he thought about was how to hype himself up. It is egoism and extremism. I feel very negative about it. What has May 9 to do with it? Of course, the parade is not the same anymore... [there is a war], and we're marching over here... It was the first parade that I didn't watch».

«Spravedlivaya Rossiya» told Galina that a request for a ministerial inquiry should be submitted by a lawyer. Eventually, a request to Tatyana Moskalkova, the Commissioner for Human Rights, was made by a CPRF (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation) representative Oleg Smolin. The Presidential Executive Office recommended Mumrikova to wait for the responses from all the other places and come only afterwards.

«It seems to me that not everyone understands yet that we have a civil war [in our country]», Galina says. «I have an elder son. He told me that if they arrested Grisha, there was some reason behind that. We stopped talking to each other after that. Even though we are one family».

Sergey Kagermazov

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