

Ukraine Is Not A Brothel

a film by Kitty Green

UKRAINE IS NOT A BROTHEL

THE FEMEN STORY

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MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
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Cinephil

A FILM BY KITTY GREEN "UKRAINE IS NOT A BROTHEL" IN ASSOCIATION WITH NOISE AND LIGHT PRODUCERS KITTY GREEN AND JONATHAN AUF DER HEIDE AND MICHAEL LATHAM
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL LATHAM EDITOR KITTY GREEN COMPOSERS JED PALMER AND ZOE BARRY SOUND DESIGNER JED PALMER PRODUCTION DESIGNER SALES CINEPHIL DIRECTED BY KITTY GREEN



NOISE
LIGHT

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Ukraine's topless feminist sensation, Femen, has stirred up a press frenzy across Europe. Outraged by the world's image of Ukrainian women as either brides for sale or commodities of sex tourism, Femen bare their breasts in protest to disrupt this perception and agitate against these brutal patriarchal forces.

SYNOPSIS

Ukraine's topless feminist sensation, Femen, has stirred up a press frenzy across Europe. Outraged by the world's image of Ukrainian women as either brides for sale or commodities of sex tourism, Femen bare their breasts in protest to disrupt this perception and agitate against these brutal patriarchal forces. Now, for the first time, 'Ukraine Is Not A Brothel' offers an intimate glimpse into the world's most provocative feminist organization. A movement that began in the snow-filled streets of a corrupt, post-Soviet Ukraine, Femen's naked war against patriarchy is gaining momentum across Europe, but before they take the world by storm, these bold and beautiful women must first come to terms with the sometimes contradictory forces and motives that powered their movement's rise to international prominence.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KITTY GREEN (DIRECTOR)

What is Femen?

Femen is a topless feminist protest movement that began in Kiev, Ukraine almost four years ago. The group of young women first came together to fight the rising rate of sex tourism and prostitution in Ukraine. Femen have since expanded, declaring a worldwide war on patriarchy.

Where did you first hear of them?

I first read about Femen in a tabloid newspaper that I picked up off the floor of a train in Melbourne. There was a picture of a young, blonde in a fishnet tights, with thick black eyeliner, holding a hand-painted sign saying, 'Ukraine is not a Brothel'. It was a beautifully contradictory image, an image that simultaneously displayed her strength and her naivety.

What motivated you to follow them?

After quitting my job at the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) in Melbourne, I packed my bags and traveled to my grandmother's native Ukraine. I spent a month photographing her village and filming interviews with relatives. On my way back to Kiev, I read that Femen would be protesting the following day in the fountain on Independence Square. The protest was called, 'No water in our taps! We'll wash in the fountain!' The next morning, I arrived at the square with my DSLR, found my place amongst the flurry of press and onlookers, and chased these gorgeous girls as they

were dragged away kicking and screaming by the Ukrainian security forces. After filming one protest, I was hooked.

How did you make first contact and with whom?

I first met the girls at Café Cupidon, their old headquarters, in Kiev. I showed them the footage that I had shot of their protest in Independent Square. It was very different to the news reel footage that the Kiev press gives them, perhaps due to my background in cinema. My footage had close-ups of their faces and the finer details – discarded floral wreaths, angry faces in the crowd etc. They loved it. From that moment on, whenever they were protesting, they wanted me there to shoot. I was invited into the inner circle.

How long did you follow them?

I spent fourteen months living with four Femen activists in a crumbling 2-bedroom Soviet apartment on the outskirts of Kiev. My cinematographer, Michael Latham, spent 4 months in Kiev (sleeping on our floor) and the bulk of the interviews were shot in his presence. I couldn't have made this film with a big crew. The strength of this film comes from the close relationship that I had with the girls.

Was your choice of using interviews as a structural device there from the start or did it arise in the editing room from your material?

Every day during the shoot, we would have three or four news media organisations, many international, come visit Femen for interviews. The girls are experts at controlling the media and have an answer prepared for any question that a journalist could possibly ask. I was searching for a way to get honest answers out of these women, and I found that as I got to know them, and as we formed a more intimate relationship, they began to trust me and open up to me about their fears and desires.

What was the biggest challenge you faced whilst filming with Femen?

When the girls were planning a trip to Belarus, "Europe's last dictatorship", I was immediately apprehensive. My Ukrainian friends warned me not to go as it was unsafe, but I decided to take the risk.

The protest against Lukashenko's regime was to take place in front of the KGB headquarters in Minsk. The streets of Minsk were dead quiet that morning. About five journalists showed up to cover Femen's protest. Two of them disappeared after taking a few shots. I wondered why they weren't staying to watch the arrest. It was then that a secret service man grabbed me by the arm and dragged me from the scene into a small room at the back of the KGB building. They took my camera and my telephone and left me there for hours. After a few hours, some men entered and dragged me off into a van and drove me to a second location. I asked repeatedly for a translator. They denied my requests.

After a few more hours in a dark room, I was given my camera back. The footage had been deleted. I was told I would be escorted to the train station. My escort sat opposite me on the train all the way across the border into Lithuania. At Vilnius station, he smiled at me darkly and said 'Goodbye' in Russian. I ran out into the dark streets of Vilnius.

The girls suffered a harsher punishment. They were thrust into a van and taken to a forest near the Ukrainian border where they were stripped and beaten.

What is your personal opinion about both their agenda and their means?

Whilst I have many reservations about the way Femen is managed, I have an unwavering faith in its women. Inna and Sasha Shevchenko are two of the boldest women I know. I have no doubt that they can achieve anything they set their minds too. I have already seen what Inna is capable of in France and I sincerely hope that Femen can grow into a productive and sustainable organization that not only raises awareness of women's issues but has the capacity to protect and defend the rights of women and girls across the globe.

Was there any gap between what you thought you'd find before you met with them and between what you finally did?

I arrived in Kiev thinking I'd be making a documentary about a group of bold young women who, whilst employing unusual and almost contradictory methods, were trying their hardest to make their country a safer and better place for women. A few months in, as I got closer to the girls, that picture became more complicated. I remember vividly, during a particular meeting, regarding a trip to Turkey sponsored by a slimey Turkish businessman who was using Femen to promote his lingerie brand, thinking to myself, 'Am I the only feminist at this table?' I was faced with a choice, I could abandon the film and find another subject for a documentary (one that I could stand behind whole-heartedly), or I could stay in Ukraine and make a film that paints an honest portrait of this movement. I chose the latter.

When I finally got to ask these girls the tough questions, and they were forced to reflect on their own organization and its contradictions, I was amazed at their strength and honesty. I believe, as result of this introspection, the women of Femen will be (and already have been) making better choices moving forward.

Do you see any change in the Ukraine since Femen started its activity?

Femen's main aim in Ukraine is to raise awareness about the subjugation of women. In my opinion, Femen's presence in the press, whether they are painted in a positive or negative light, has had a powerful effect on the youth in Ukraine. Feminism is no longer a dirty word. Protest is no longer a dirty word. Whether people love them or hate them, Femen provoke debate and, in doing so, play an important role in politicizing the youth in Ukraine.

Did you choose the music for the film as a running commentary on events?

The music tracks used in the film are very famous throughout the post-Soviet bloc. I heard them many times, on trains and in parades, while traveling across and throughout Ukraine. I was drawn to The Red Army Choir, in particular, because of the booming patriarchal tone in the tracks. This large choir of deep and masculine vocals became a perfect counterpoint to the high-pitched squeals and screams of Femen's activists.

KITTY GREEN (DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EDITOR)

Kitty Green graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts. Her graduating short film 'Spilt' premiered at the Brisbane International Film Festival and screened at festivals internationally, picking up awards for its 'provocative' nature. After graduating, Kitty worked at ABC on 'Art Nation' and 'Artscape', shooting, editing and producing documentary content for national broadcast.

Kitty spent the last year in her grandmother's native Ukraine filming with the women of Ukraine's topless feminist movement 'Femen'. Her protest footage was screened by news media outlets all over the globe. Kitty's abduction by the KGB, whilst filming a Femen protest in Belarus, made headlines both in Australia and internationally. 'Ukraine is not a Brothel' is Kitty's feature debut.



JONATHAN AUF DER HEIDE (PRODUCER)

Jonathan took out the Best Emerging Filmmaker Award at the 2008 Melbourne International Film Festival. His short film Hell's Gates also won Best Student Film at MIFF following from its success at the 2007 Victorian College of the Arts Graduation Awards where it won: Best Film, Best 3rd Year Film & Best Director. His debut feature Van Diemen's Land screened at many festivals including Melbourne, Sydney, Edinburgh, Torino, Montreal, Sitges and Fantastic Fest before its theatrical release was met with critical acclaim. "A born filmmaker... a film you're unlikely to ever forget" - David Stratton, The Australian.

In 2010, Jonathan took part in a panel discussion 'Beyond The Convict Stain' for the King's College in London. He also launched the conference 'Found In Translation' for Monash University in Prato, Italy as a keynote speaker. In 2012, Jonathan was a speaker for the debate "Is The Screen Mightier Than The Sword" on Big Ideas (ABC1). Most recently, Jonathan completed filming his segment for the omnibus feature The Turning, a screen adaptation of Tim Winton's best selling novel.

MICHAEL LATHAM (PRODUCER, CINEMATOGRAPHER)

Michael Latham is a AFI nominated filmmaker, currently focusing on producing and cinematography. His most recent projects include 'Mine Kafon' (cinematographer & producer) which received a Jury Prize at the Focus Forward Awards, Sundance 2013 and 'Tau Seru' (cinematographer) which premiered at Critic's Week, Cannes 2013.

"Ukraine is not a brothel!" (Venice International Film Festival, 2013) is his debut feature as both a producer and cinematographer.

Michael is currently in production of his second feature length documentary as producer & cinematographer in collaboration with director Callum Cooper.



CREDITS

Director	Kitty Green
Producers	Kitty Green Jonathan auf der Heide Michael Latham
Cinematography	Michael Latham
Operators	Kitty Green Michael Latham
Editor	Kitty Green
Post Production Services	Camera Club & Pocket Post
Colorist	CJ Dobson
Sound Design	Jed Palmer
Composers	Jed Palmer and Zoë Barry
Legals	Shaun Miller Lawyers
Music Clearance	Path Music

Special Thanks

Pasha the KGB Translator

Special Thanks

Jane Campion

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FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

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Venice Film Review: ‘Ukraine Is Not a Brothel’



SEPTEMBER 12, 2013 | 06:48AM PT

Kitty Green's fascinating documentary offers a nuanced, thoughtful portrait of the Ukrainian feminist group Femen.

Leslie Felperin

Debutante Aussie helmer [Kitty Green](#) strips away spin and half-truths to reveal the complex story of Femen, the Ukrainian feminist group famous for its topless protests, in [“Ukraine Is Not a Brothel.”](#) The big reveal in this fascinating documentary, that Femen was effectively run for years by a sinister if charismatic man — Victor Svyatski, interviewed here — has already made headlines around the world, which surely won’t hurt the pic’s commercial prospects. But that shouldn’t distract from the fact that Green also offers a nuanced, thoughtful portrait of courageous if sometimes muddle-headed women fighting on the side of the angels.

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Structuring the story around face-to-face interviews with a number of the Femen collective’s key players, particularly longstanding members Inna Shevchenko and Alexandra “Sasha” Shevchenko, helmer Green doesn’t try to disguise how embedded she was among the women while shooting the film. Her voice, speaking fluent Ukrainian, is often heard off camera asking questions, and clearly the Femen-ists grew to trust her deeply over the 14 months she spent living among them.

That intimacy pays off in spades here, as does Green's good fortune in getting involved with Femen at a key juncture in the group's history, when stakes became raised enough to prompt several members to leave Ukraine for France and make, pardon the pun, a clean breast of the group's relationship with Svyatski, perhaps as a result of Green's coaxing.

Through a mix of interviews, archival material and original footage of the femmes staging bare-breasted protests, Green unfolds the story of how this neo-Situationist group came together originally, aiming in the early days to combat, in particular, the Ukraine's image as the sex-trafficking and prostitution hub of Europe — hence the pic's title, one of the slogans they wrote on their naked torsos. Soon Femen's range of targets expanded to encompass patriarchy in general, the persecution of Russian sisters-in-defiance Pussy Riot, and totalitarian regimes like that of Belarus. It was in this latter country that Green herself was seized by authorities while trying to film a Femen protest in Minsk and subsequently deported; several Femen members, separated from Green at the time, explain how they were arrested, stripped, physically abused, covered in gasoline and forced to flee the country through a freezing cold forest at night.

Based on evidence here, audiences could justifiably accuse the Femen crew of being naive and shaky in their grasp of feminist doctrine, their philosophy riddled with ironies and paradoxes, but no one can deny they've got guts, and the bruises to show for it. Pic will spark lively post-screening Q&A sessions at the many festivals it's no doubt destined to appear at, raising issues as it does about the state of feminism today, particularly in former Eastern-bloc nations and the developing world.

The involvement of the bizarre Svyatski, likened to Rasputin by a slightly on-the-nose soundtrack choice from Boney M, is really secondary to the story, even if it has generated most of the film's current publicity. Green cleverly builds up suspense about this figure, making him a shadowy offscreen presence up until the final act, which adds tension but also lets the women themselves rightly take centerstage at first. They are presented with a canny blend of sympathy and honesty, as when one of them sees no real contradiction in her being a Femen member by day and a nude dancer in a strip club by night.

Non-source music by Zoe Barry and Jed Palmer adds atmosphere in some of the moodier moments, including a few arty shots of Inna on subway escalators, while cheeky use of Soviet anthems sung by the Red Army Choir adds counterpoint to a montage of their violent scuffles with the police. Pic could benefit from end titles to bring the story up-to-date, especially when it airs on upscale TV stations.

THE Hollywood REPORTER

Ukraine Is Not a Brothel (Ukraina ne bordel): Film Review

12:40 PM PDT 9/24/2013 by Boyd van Hoeij



The Bottom Line: *An insightful and cinematic look at the complex truth behind the topless protests phenomenon.*

Australian director Kitty Green's documentary offers an inside look at Femen, the often bare-breasted feminist protest group from Ukraine.

The topless feminist protest movement Femen from Ukraine is virtually X-rayed in *Ukraine Is Not a Brothel (Ukraina ne bordel)*, the revealing and powerful documentary debut of Australian director **Kitty Green**.

The film's biggest shock or eye-opener, widely reported after the film had its world premiere at the recent Venice Film Festival, is that not only a shady male specter, **Victor Svyatski**, is behind the group but that this unknown Svengali, who is one of Green's numerous insider interviewees, turns out to be practically a role model for the dominant patriarchic male society that the bottle blond, long-legged and eyebrow-plucked feminists so aggressively denounce in their famous, bare-breasted protests.

Festivals will want to get their hands on this hot item, which not only examines the complexity and many paradoxes of Femen in a very accessible way but also reveals that Green, who also edited as well as co-shot the film during her 14-month stay with the Femen girls in Kiev, has clearly got a knack for finding interesting subjects and imbuing her material with some genuine cinematic scope.

Green, a former Australian Broadcasting Corporation employee with Ukrainian roots, kicks off with an enigmatic shot of a man wearing a rabbit mask before showing a supermodel-gorgeous woman, clearly bare-chested under a heavy winter coat, sitting in a taxi that's driving her home, where she'll wash off the text written in paint on her body. **Boney M's Rasputin** plays on the soundtrack, if probably not in the taxi, which, as

the camera highlights by focusing on the male driver and the image of a male saint dangling underneath the rearview mirror, quietly represents exactly the kind of dogmatic, male-dominated society that the young Femen ladies protest against.

The film builds up its image of Femen with carefully selected and edited interview material and footage of some of their protests, which invariably end with the women being aggressively dragged away and manhandled by male policemen, which only proves their point that women are practically slaves in a male-dominated society. One of their early slogans, "Ukraine Is Not a Brothel," not only provided the title for this documentary but also points in the direction of one of the reasons Femen was created in the first place: to dispel the notion that Ukrainian women were all either sex slaves abroad or prostitutes at home.

"I'm **Beyonce**," says one of the Femen members about how she feels when on camera, and clearly, many of the girls feel that there's a show and exhibitionist element that's just as important as the political impact and meaning of their carefully engineered protests. The girls all look gorgeous except for one member whose Rubenesque figure is used ironically -- she's branded a "sex bomb" in a bomb scare-like protest at a train station -- and who, in her candid interview, reveals just how important looks are for Femen.

A nifty montage featuring headlines and articles about their protests coins the phrase "political porn" and there is indeed something slightly weird and paradoxical about a pro-female liberation protest group that uses bare breasts to draw the male gaze to their position as the subjugated sex. There is some kind of weird poetic irony in finding out, then, that Svyatski is the brain behind the protests, which have become more generally anti-establishment and anti-religion since Femen's inception in 2008.

This revelation is carefully planned by Green, who edits in hints throughout the material that a male presence -- already spied, albeit masked, in the opening shot -- operates behind the scenes, with many of the Femen girls being interrupted during their interviews by Skype calls from Victor. When, around the 50-minute mark, he finally gets his say and even takes off his mask, he rather shockingly denounces his Femen protesters as "weak" and admits that he himself is a "patriarchal influence" on the girls even though this is exactly what his protests, executed by the girls, are trying to overthrow.

Green beautifully allows the material (and the characters) to speak for itself, revealing just how full of paradoxes and steeped in a male-chauvinist attitude even theoretically feminist movements can be, further underlining why they are necessary. That said, a postscript that recounts what happened after the documentary wrapped would be useful, since the open-ended finally doesn't make it clear that Victor has since been forced to leave Femen and the group has relocated to Paris (something only vaguely hinted at), also because the Ukrainian authorities have criminally charged the Femen members, which would mean the girls could spend years in a Kiev jail -- likened to Guantanamo Bay by their young lawyer -- if they're ever arrested again.

Technically, the film is handsomely assembled.